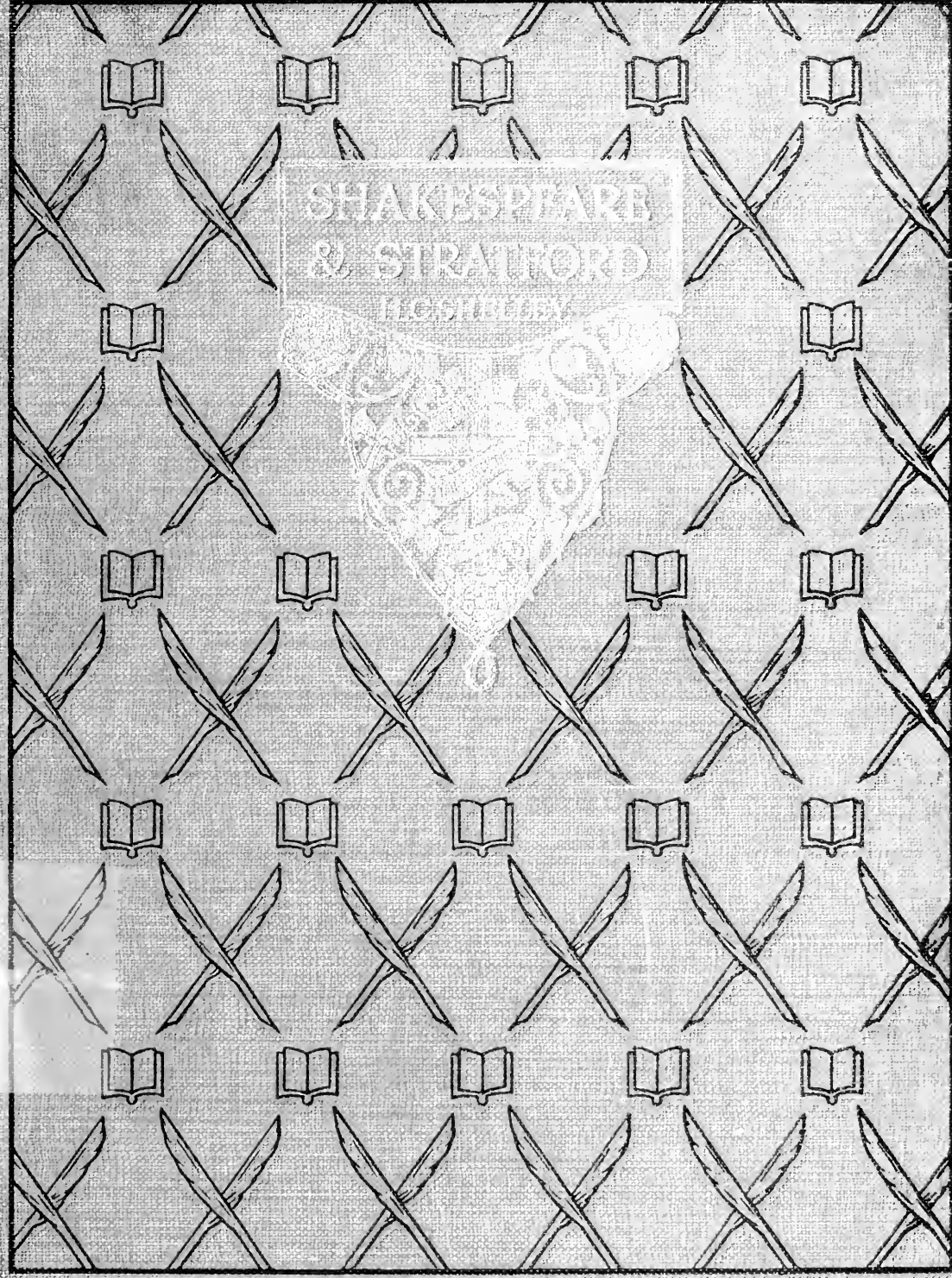
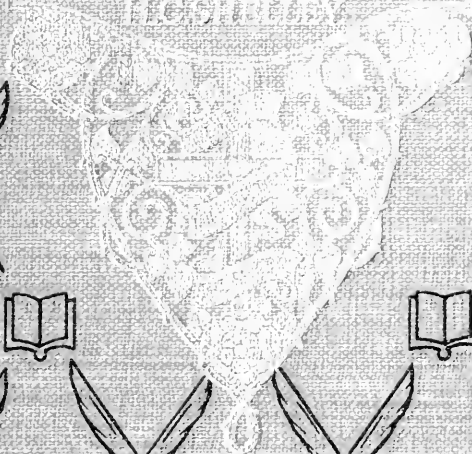


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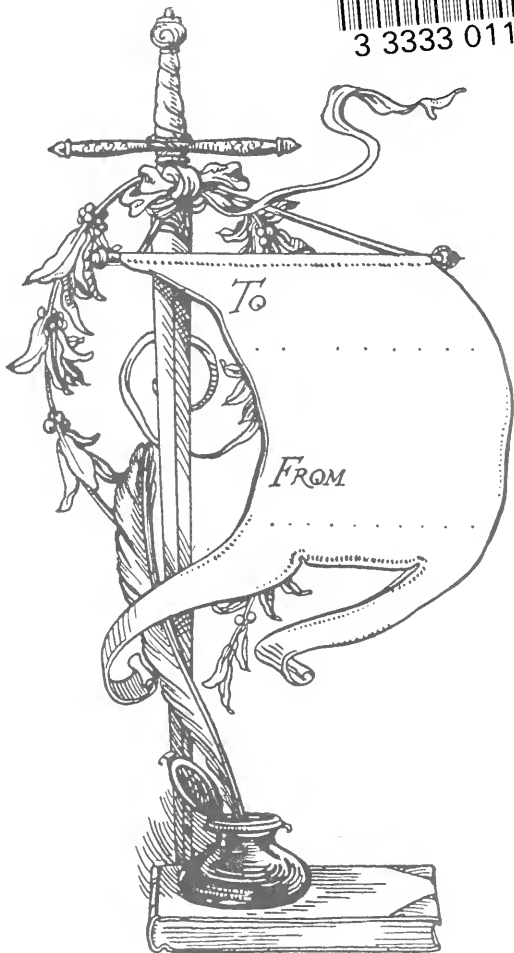
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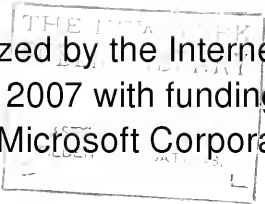
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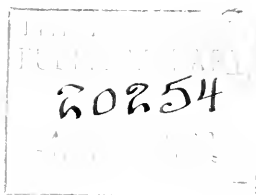
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CHAPTER I : THE BIRTHPLACE

“**W**ASN'T he foxy to choose a cute little place like that in which to write his plays?”

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to explain that the questioner was a daughter of Uncle Sam, but for the sake of elucidation it is needful to add that the “cute little place” referred to was a trim, half-timbered building in Henley Street, Stratford-on-Avon, and that the “he” was none other than William Shakespeare.†

It must be noted, however, that the picturesque question was not in accordance with knowledge or tradition. There is nothing to support the implied theory that “Hamlet” and the other plays were written in the Henley Street cottage, nor do any of the many legends clustering around that structure claim for it so high an honour. But to credit Shakespeare with the deliberate choice of a literary workshop is all of a piece with the uncertainty in which so much of his life-story is involved.

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Most pilgrims to Stratford-on-Avon have a clearer notion of what they seek when they turn their footsteps in the direction of Henley Street. Following the order of nature, their first desire on reaching Shakespeare's town is to gaze upon the shrine of his nativity, and for more than a century and a half tradition has declared that the three-gabled cottage on the north side of the street in question is *the* birthplace.

But is it? As it ill becomes the Shakespearean to "worship shadows and adore false shapes," the question should be faced boldly and regardless of consequences. Let it be admitted, then, even though such honesty is rare, that there is an older tradition which is fatal to the claims of the Henley Street house. A late echo of that tradition sounded in the ears of Washington Irving, for did not the old sexton express "a doubt" as to the genuineness of the birthplace? It is true that the kindly Geoffrey Crayon, in keeping with his character as a "Gent.," explained the sexton's suspicion on the score of envy, but if he had been acquainted with the lore of the learned and industrious William Oldys he would have realized

THE BIRTHPLACE

that the sexton had good reason for his scepticism. Oldys, in fact, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century had recorded a tradition to the effect that Shakespeare was born in a house near the churchyard, and this legend persisted until the nineteenth century. "A house near the river," as the laborious J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps wrote, "called the Brook House, now pulled down, was some years since asserted to have been the birth-place of Shakespeare."

What makes matters still worse for the Henley Street shrine is that the earliest visitors who were drawn to Stratford-on-Avon by the fame of Shakespeare entirely ignored its existence. One of the most curious and unnoticed facts in the biography of the dramatist is that he had been dead some seven years before his connexion with Stratford-on-Avon was recorded in print. Of course his name had appeared in contemporary literature long prior to 1616. So much emphasis has been laid upon our shadowy knowledge of the poet that it is often forgotten that his name is of frequent occurrence in prose and verse from 1592 onwards. The year just named was the date of

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Robert Greene's splenetic and envious reference to the young dramatist as "the only Shakescene in a countrie," but three years later he was christened "Sweet Shakespeare," and thenceforward the chorus of his praise constantly swelled in volume. And yet not one of the numerous references has any allusion to Stratford.

Undoubtedly his fellow players and poets were well aware that Shakespeare was a native of Stratford, and yet it was not until 1623, when he had been dead seven years, that his name was associated with the town on the Avon. That topographical service was rendered by Leonard Digges, one of the four poets who contributed commendatory verses to the famous First Folio, which marked the earliest attempt to give the world a complete edition of Shakespeare's plays. The volume was published in 1623, and it was not until that date that the reading public, through Leonard Digges's assertion that Shakespeare's plays would be alive when "Time dissolves thy Stratford monument," learnt the meagre fact that the poet was buried in that Warwickshire town.

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Such a casual reference, however, may easily have been overlooked by those curious in biographical details, and hence it is highly probable that until the appearance of Sir William Dugdale's monumental work on the antiquities of Warwickshire in 1656 few were aware of Shakespeare's close connexion with Stratford. To Dugdale, then, belongs the credit of advertising the association in an authoritative manner, for in concluding his notice of Stratford he wrote: "One thing more, in reference to this ancient town, is observable, that it gave birth and sepulture to our late famous poet, Will. Shakespeare." And the antiquary did not confine himself to that brief reference; in his account of the tombs in Holy Trinity Church he quoted the inscription on the poet's grave and monument, and presented his readers with a sketch, more imaginary than accurate, of the "Stratford monument" mentioned by Digges.

But, and this is the significant fact, Dugdale made no reference to the house in which the poet was born. He visited the town three years before his book was published—that is, in 1653—

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and at that time, only thirty-seven years after Shakespeare died, there were of course many Stratfordians who could have pointed out the dramatist's birthplace. Perhaps, however, the antiquary was not interested in such matters, and that indifference seems to have been shared by many subsequent visitors. In fact, a diligent examination of old records, printed and in manuscript, yields the result that all through the seventeenth century there is no reference to any one specific building as the actual birthplace of Shakespeare. Indeed, one traveller of the late seventeenth century wrote up his diary without mentioning Shakespeare at all. Stratford, he noted, was "well built, with fair streets and good inns," possessed "one good church" and a "long and well-built bridge"; but he wrote never a word about its most famous son. And that was in 1682.

Such visitors, however, who were of a more literary turn of mind contented themselves for many years with paying their devotion at the poet's grave. Thus a diarist named Dowdall, who passed through Stratford in 1693, confined

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his record to the church and grave; and another pilgrim, William Hall by name, who visited the town the following year, had much to relate of the poet's burial-place, but, like Dowdall and the others, made no reference to the house in which he was born. Even Horace Walpole, who did not usually overlook much, explored Stratford in the summer of 1751 without discovering the birthplace. Still later, indeed—that is, in 1760, and only nine years before Garrick's spectacular “Jubilee”—a noteworthy visitor was wholly silent as to the dramatist's natal shrine.

Yet it would be unjust to the Mecca in Henley Street not to admit that by about the middle of the eighteenth century it had begun to rival the attraction of the tomb in Holy Trinity Church, and that by 1769, the year when Garrick exploited himself at Shakespeare's expense, the cottage was firmly established in popular favour as the veritable scene of the poet's nativity. How the earlier tradition referred to above—that which located the event in the Brook House near the river—was supplanted in favour of Henley Street is a mystery which will probably never be solved.

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Unfortunately, too, the perplexities of those who do not wish to "worship shadows and adore false shapes" are not exhausted by the rival claims of the Brook House and Henley Street. There are problems native to Henley Street *qua* Henley Street. When Nathan Drake, in 1817, made the confident assertion that "the very roof that sheltered Shakespeare's infant innocence can still be pointed out," he postulated a credulity which is no longer possible. Waiving for the moment the question as to whether Henley Street is the correct locality, it is indubitable that while some of the timber framework and fragments of the plaster of the birthplace may have survived from the second half of the sixteenth century, the actual roof of John Shakespeare's house disappeared many years ago. No other conclusion is possible from the various drawings which were made of the building from 1762 onward.

Several stages in the history of the appearance of the birthplace are illustrated by drawings exhibited in one of the rooms of that building. The earliest of these is a pencil sketch made in 1788, which was founded on a drawing executed

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in 1769. Both these bear a strong likeness to the picture of 1762 which Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps reproduced in one of his books. In fact, all the oldest illustrations have several features in common. They show a modest building consisting of two houses, each having its own doorway, but the structure on the east is distinguished from that on the west by having two gables to its companion's one. And the western cottage has a penthouse over its doorway as compared with the unsheltered entrance of the other. In each the surface of the wall is broken up with those massive beams of timber which were so picturesque a feature of houses built in the sixteenth century. It should be added that the right-hand upstairs window of the eastern house was in the form of a projecting bay.

When, however, the drawings made in the early nineteenth century are examined it will be observed that the most notable features of the eighteenth-century pictures have disappeared. The penthouse of the western house has given place to two projecting windows, while the bay of the eastern cottage has become a flat window of

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four lights. By 1849, too, in the unerring testimony of a photograph, other changes had taken place, including the bricking over of a part of the front wall. In all these later illustrations, moreover, the most striking difference is the aspect presented by the roof, for the three gables of the two houses have been entirely demolished. An ingenious attempt has been made to explain this transformation as having been caused by the window tax, but such a theory ignores the fact that the window tax was first imposed in 1697, and that it was only levied on houses having more than six windows. The more probable explanation of the alterations in the outward appearance of the birthplace is that they were rendered necessary as repairs to the original structure. When the structure was restored it was natural that the architect and builder should closely follow the oldest drawings, and hence its aspect to-day is a trim replica of the sketches of the second half of the eighteenth century.

Having disentangled the history of the objective aspect of the birthplace, the labours of the seeker after truth are by no means at an end. There

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remains the vital question of deciding in which of the rooms Shakespeare was born. If one could accept the confident statement of the official leaflet, that question would be answered as soon as asked. But that is impossible. One reason is provided by the itinerary of a Rev. R. Warner who visited Stratford in 1801. "On inquiring for the birthplace of our great poet," he wrote, "we were not a little surprised to be carried through a small butcher's shop into a dirty back room." And yet it is a front room upstairs which is shown as the actual birth-chamber!

Nor does that exhaust the mystery. While it seems probable that the "dirty back room" into which Mr. Warner was shown was situated in the western half of the birthplace, and while the upstairs front room which is now pointed out as the scene of the poet's nativity is in the same portion, there can be no question that if Shakespeare was born in either of the Henley Street cottages he was born in a room of the eastern and not the western building. It is nothing to the purpose that the walls of the alleged birth-room are covered with the autographs of credulous

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pilgrims ; they were all inscribed prior to the discovery of those documents which have thrown light on John Shakespeare's connexion with the two Henley Street houses.

What, then, are the facts ? Briefly, that while John Shakespeare became the owner of the eastern cottage in 1556, it was not until 1575 that he obtained possession of the western building. That is to say, William Shakespeare was eleven years old before his father owned or occupied the building in which his birth-room is so confidently located !

When Washington Irving paid his first visit to Stratford in 1815 he was in no such critical mood as is common with the pilgrim of the twentieth century. "I am always," he confessed, "of easy faith in such matters, and am willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant and costs nothing. I am therefore a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes of goblins and great men ; and would advise all travellers who travel for their gratification to be the same. What is it to us whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the

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belief of them, and enjoy all the charm of the reality? There is nothing like resolute good-humoured credulity in these matters." Easy faith of a bygone day! But the scientific historian has rendered such confidence impossible.

Then the sum of the matter is this. Bearing in mind the priority of the Brook House legend, and remembering that John Shakespeare's purchase of the eastern cottage in Henley Street does not necessarily imply that he required it for a residence, it is feasible that the birth of William Shakespeare in April 1564 took place in that long-demolished cottage near the river, for in such a country town as Stratford an early tradition out-values a volume of learned speculation. If an explanation is asked as to how it came to pass that the Henley Street building, and above all the western portion of that structure, has been since 1759 known as the poet's birthplace, Sir Sidney Lee supplies the answer. "The fact of its long occupancy by the poet's collateral descendants accounts for the identification of the western rather than the eastern tenement with his birthplace."

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

But are not all these cold facts fatal to the ardour of hero-worship? By no means. If it were definitely proved that not even the eastern cottage in Henley Street has any claim to being the birthplace of the dramatist, nothing can rob it and its companion of the distinction which attaches to both buildings as having been the childhood home of Shakespeare. Here, then, by the time the future poet had attained his eleventh year, the family home was located, and it is probable that thenceforward William Shakespeare knew no other abode in Stratford until he left his native town for that adventure in London which was to have such momentous results.

John Shakespeare's purchase in 1575 of the western cottage in Henley Street seems to have marked the zenith of his fortunes. Up to that year he had been eminently successful in the practical affairs of life. A native of the adjacent village of Snitterfield, where his father was a farmer in easy circumstances, John Shakespeare appears to have removed to Stratford about 1551 and set up in business as a general dealer in agricultural products. He has been described as

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a butcher, a glover, a husbandman, a corn-dealer, a wool merchant, and so on, but such occupations must not be regarded as contradictory or as exclusive of each other. To the present day the general store of rural England is an emporium of bewildering resource, and hence it is not surprising that a tradesman of the sixteenth century should have dealt in so many articles as were purveyed by John Shakespeare. That in the sum total of his various occupations the father of the poet reaped substantial profit may be inferred from the fact that in 1556 he is found purchasing some real estate, and the following year effected a marriage with Mary Arden, the daughter of a prosperous farmer of Wilmcote. From the latter date, too, he began to take a prominent position in the life of Stratford, for in 1557 he was appointed one of the four ale-tasters of the town, men whose duty it was to sample the wares of the local brewers and see that the ale and beer were alike good, wholesome, and reasonable in price. John Shakespeare evidently approved himself a competent assayer of malt liquors, for in the following year he was chosen one of the four

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petty constables of the town, and thus was clothed with still larger authority over the daily life of Stratfordians. During the next decade, too, he was elected to four other municipal offices of increasing importance, one of which, that of chamberlain or treasurer, he filled for two terms. His crowning honour as a townsman came in 1568, when he was voted to the position of high bailiff—that is, mayor—of Stratford.

Four years earlier—that is, in the month of April 1564—there had been born to him that son William who was to make the name of Shakespeare illustrious in the literary annals of the world. The actual date of his birth is not known. Such an assertion may surprise those who rely upon calendars and the confident statements of biographical dictionaries, in which April 23 is cited as the birthday. But that date rests solely upon inference and tradition. The inference is deduced from the record of the poet's baptism on April 26 in the register of Holy Trinity Church. It was customary, so the theorists argue, to baptize a child on the third day after its birth, and hence, as Shakespeare was baptized on April 26, he must

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have been born on the 23rd. Perhaps in the average baptisms may have followed births at a three days' interval; but, as countless exceptions could be cited, and as there was no secular or ecclesiastical law on the subject, the inference in Shakespeare's case is not valid. He may have been a weakling like Addison, who, on that account, was baptized on the actual day of his birth, or circumstances may have delayed his baptism a week or even ten days. But the theorists support their case by legend as well as by inference. It is established, they claim, that Shakespeare died on April 23, and that it was an early tradition that he passed away on his birthday. The claim may be allowed; he did die on April 23; but the tradition as to the coincidence has no more value than any of the many other legends associated with Shakespeare's name.

If inference is to have any weight, De Quincey's theory in favour of April 22 as the actual birthday has most in its favour, "Shakespeare's sole granddaughter, Lady Barnard, was married on April 22, 1626, ten years exactly after the poet's death; and the reason for choosing this day

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might have had a reference to her illustrious grandfather's birthday, which, there is good reason for thinking, would be celebrated as a festival in the family for generations. Still, this choice *may* have been an accident, or governed merely by reason of convenience." In the end De Quincey grew out of favour with his own theory, and advised acquiescence in the legendary April 23, with the reservation that we cannot do wrong if we drink to the poet's memory on both days.

Wherever John Shakespeare was residing during the year he was high bailiff of Stratford, his term of office was marked by an event which must have impressed the imagination of his son William. For, suggestively enough, John Shakespeare's occupancy of the post of high bailiff coincided with the two earliest visits of strolling players of which there is any record in the annals of the town. His term of office began in the September of 1568 and terminated in the same month of the following year, and it is written in the accounts of Stratford that in 1569 the "Quene's players" were awarded a sum of nine shillings and the

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“Erle of Worcester’s pleers” the sum of twelve pence. When read in the light of the manners of the times these entries are full of interest. They postulate, for one thing, a keen interest in the drama in John Shakespeare, for the strolling players of those days could not act in a town without the permission of the mayor, and it was to him they looked for the remuneration of their first performance. The first performance, then, was known as the Mayor’s play, and he, as the chief patron, would see to it that the members of his family and his own special friends were not the least favoured among the spectators.

On two different occasions, then, in 1569 the Queen’s players and the Earl of Worcester’s players set up their stage in Stratford town, and it is not carrying probability far to conclude that on each occasion the audiences included the lad who was destined to become the chief glory of the English drama. It is true he was only in his sixth year at the time, but that that was not too tender an age for a playgoer in the sixteenth century is proved by the parallel case, cited by Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, of the six-year-old son of

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the mayor of Gloucester, who stood between his father's knees and "saw and heard very well" while a company of strolling players performed "The Cradle of Security." How moving an event a child's first experience of a theatrical performance may be has been described once for all by Charles Lamb, and what was true of his own emotions on such an occasion was doubtless anticipated in the case of the youthful Shakespeare.

But to return to the two cottages in Henley Street. Whatever may have been John Shakespeare's connexion with the eastern tenement prior to 1575, it is beyond question that from that year he was the owner and occupier of both buildings. And it is also a fact that the two structures remained in the possession of his descendants until 1806.

Why John Shakespeare needed both cottages is explained partly by his multifarious occupations and partly by the ample proportions of his family. According to the present ground plan, the combined buildings contained twelve rooms, but it is probable that the annex to the rear of the western

THE BIRTHPLACE

cottage was in the poet's time a mere lean-to of inconsiderable accommodation. If that were the case, the rooms were but eight in number, and of those the two on the ground floor of the eastern tenement seem to have been used for commercial purposes, leaving six apartments for domestic use. Then, as now, there was doubtless an interior communication between the two houses, but it seems probable that within a few years after John Shakespeare's death in 1601 the interior doorway was built up so that the houses might be once more occupied as separate dwellings. And it was in the western portion the descendants of John Shakespeare lived for the long period noted above, the eastern cottage being let for various purposes and finally transformed into an inn known as the Maidenhead, then as the Swan and Maidenhead, and latterly as the Swan. During the eighteenth century the front room of the western cottage was turned into a butcher's shop, and it still retained traces of such an establishment when visited by Nathaniel Hawthorne about the middle of the last century.

As has been shown above, up to the middle of

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the eighteenth century none of the pilgrims to Stratford seem to have been curious about the poet's birthplace. For nearly a century and a half, then, its whereabouts and identity were treated with indifference. Then came a change, the chief cause of which must be sought in that over-decorated festival known as Garrick's "Shakespearean Jubilee." As the year of that three days' celebration was 1769, the use of the word "jubilee" was a misnomer, for it did not coincide with either the birth or death year of the dramatist. And the whole affair had so many ridiculous features that Samuel Foote, who did not love Garrick, had an easy task in satirizing its principal events. "A jubilee," he wrote, "as it hath lately appeared, is a public invitation, circulated and urged by puffing, to go post without horses, to an obscure borough without representatives, governed by a mayor and aldermen who are no magistrates, to celebrate a great poet, whose own works have made him immortal, by an ode without poetry, music without melody, dinners without victuals, and lodgings without beds; a masquerade where half the people appeared

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barefaced, a horse-race up to the knees in water, fireworks extinguished as soon as they were lighted, a gingerbread amphitheatre, which, like a house of cards, tumbled to pieces as soon as it was finished."

Foote's reference to Stratford as "an obscure borough" was hardly more uncomplimentary than Garrick's description of it as "the most dirty, unseemly, ill-pav'd, wretched-looking town in all Britain," a verdict which was a replica of Horace Walpole's opinion, penned eighteen years earlier, to the effect that it was the "wretchedest old town" he had ever seen. Garrick, however, reserved his opprobrium for a private letter; in his public character as the laureate of the "Jubilee" he was prolific of adulatory adjectives. And yet even in his "Ode" he made no reference to the birthplace cottages. But they were not neglected, for the records of the time tell how the humble buildings in Henley Street were adorned with a huge emblematic transparency.

If there is one day in the early history of those cottages which should be marked with a red letter it is the day when they were muffled in the

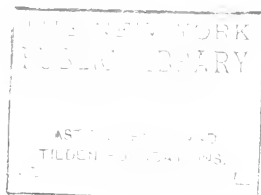
SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

gorgeous transparency of the Garrick "Jubilee." That distinction established a precedent which with every passing year would tend to the obliteration of the Brook House tradition, and consequently, if there is an explanation of how Henley Street usurped the Brook House, it must be sought in the "Jubilee" festivities of 1769.

Some years, then, before the close of the eighteenth century the western cottage was accepted as the natal shrine of Shakespeare, and by the opening years of the following century it was visited by the forerunners of that band of pilgrims which has now swollen to an annual army of some forty thousand. The first caretaker or cicerone of whom there is any record was that poetical widow, Mary Hornby by name, who did the honours of the cottage to Washington Irving. When he was shown over the house Mrs. Hornby had had twenty-two years' experience in entertaining credulous devotees, and had grown, as Irving noted, somewhat "garrulous." His picture of the widow is more vivid than the silhouette which now hangs in the house she exploited for twenty-seven years. "A garrulous old lady,"



SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE, HENLEY STREET



THE BIRTHPLACE

Irving wrote, "in a frosty red face, lighted up by a cold blue anxious eye, and garnished with artificial locks of flaxen hair, curling from under an exceedingly dirty cap. She was peculiarly assiduous," he continued, "in exhibiting the relics with which this, like all other celebrated shrines, abounds. There was the shattered stock of the very matchlock with which Shakespeare shot the deer on his poaching exploits. There, too, was his tobacco-box, which proves that he was a rival smoker to Sir Walter Raleigh ; the sword also with which he played Hamlet ; and the identical lantern with which Friar Laurence discovered Romeo and Juliet at the tomb ! There was an ample supply also of Shakespeare's mulberry-tree, which seems to have as extraordinary powers of self-multiplication as the wood of the true Cross." Such were some of the relics ; as to the building in which they were treasured the author of "The Sketch-Book " noted that it was "a small, mean-looking edifice of wood and plaster."

Washington Irving was not the first American to make a "poetical pilgrimage" to that unpretentious house. Three years earlier, namely,

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

in 1812, he had been anticipated by a fellow-countryman named Perkins, who had signalized his pilgrimage by presenting Mrs. Hornby with an album for the recording of visitors' names. That seems to have been the first visitors' book kept at the birthplace, and when its pages were filled it was succeeded by others, for at the sale of the property in 1847 five such volumes were bought by one bidder for the sum of seventy guineas.

Mr. Perkins's gift had a result which he little anticipated. That visitors' book inspired Mary Hornby with poetic ambitions. Irving, it will be remembered, in his good-humoured credulity, went so far as to accept the claims of his cicerone to a lineal descent from Shakespeare, when, luckily for his faith, she handed him a play of her own composition, "which set all belief in her consanguinity at defiance." But Mrs. Hornby had begun her poetic career on a less ambitious scale. Observing that many who inscribed the visitors' book were impelled to express their emotions in the form of verse, she was prompted to emulate their example, and for result was duly

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THE BIRTHPLACE

delivered of the following "Invitation to Shakespeare's Spring":

*"Come, drink of the fountain where Shakespeare was
born,
Like me shed a tear that from earth he was
torn,
Yet his name will outlive all the tyrants of
earth,
All princes and heroes that ever had birth,
For tyrants and princes and heroes at best
By man are evaded, by man are oppressed;
With them nature's beauties incessant are marr'd—
While the poet loves nature, 'tis God makes the
bard."*

In justification of the poetic widow it should be recorded that her wretched doggerel was not out of place in the visitors' book. None of the early nineteenth-century pilgrims were distinguished for poetic inspiration, and hence the little volume which Mrs. Hornby compiled from their and her own effusions, and published in 1817 at a shilling a copy, is not exactly a treasure-house

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of immortal verse, even though some of the lines were, on the authority of her title-page, written by "people of Genius."

But the chief interest of that collection of "Extemporary Verse" is that it bears witness to the result of Washington Irving's visit to Henley Street. Shakespeare's town owes a large debt to the American essayist, for his graceful sketch of Stratford-on-Avon gave an immense impetus to the pilgrim traffic and is to this day the inspiration of countless visitors. Little did Mrs. Hornby realize that the caller to whom she confided her belief in her Shakespearean ancestry was to be the inadvertent cause of her losing her profitable post as cicerone of the birthplace, and yet no other conclusion is possible from the plaintive prose note she inserted in that book of "Extemporary Verses." It was a breathless note, devoid of any punctuation, and read thus: "If I Mary Hornby widow should be obliged to quit this house in a short time it is my intention to take the relics that remain belonging to the immortal Shakespeare to the nearest house I can get for the amusement of those Ladies and Gentle-

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men that shall please to favour me with their company."

What had happened? Briefly, another case of the unearned increment of genius. The birthplace had been "discovered." Thanks to Washington Irving and other causes, the pilgrims to Shakespeare's shrine constantly increased in numbers. All this was to the pecuniary profit of widow Hornby; she not only had more purchasers of her "works"—the "Extemporary Verses," "The Battle of Waterloo," and "The Broken Vow"—but the "tips" of the devotees represented a considerable revenue. Now it was unfortunate for the poetical widow that she was not the owner of that lucrative birthplace; on the contrary, she was merely a tenant paying at first the modest rent of ten pounds and then twenty pounds a year. What she made from the donations of the pilgrims she declined to disclose; but the owner of the cottage came to the conclusion that twenty pounds a year was too small a proportion for her share and announced her intention of raising the rent to forty pounds. This was the juncture at which the cicerone penned that comma-less notice

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quoted above. The relics of the "immortal Shakespeare" were her own property, and she seems to have entertained the notion that without them the birthplace would be in a more desperate case than "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark.

Perhaps she was right. The scientific spirit had not been born in those days; it is quite probable that most of the pilgrims shared Irving's "easy faith" and were more impressed by the relics than by Shakespeare's birth-chamber.

Certainly Mrs. Hornby had gathered together an awe-inspiring collection. Irving's inventory was almost criminally meagre. Happily another visitor was more copious, even if not exhaustive. In 1819, then, the various "articles of Shakespeare's property" comprised the following miscellaneous items:

"His chair in the chimney-corner; the match-lock with which he shot the deer; his Toledo and walking-stick, which seemed of vine, and was elegant in its form; a small bugle-horn; his reading glass; the bench and table near his bedside where he wrote; the glass out of which he drank

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without rising in his bed in his last illness; a cup and basin; his christening bowl; his child's chair; a superb table-cover, embroidered in gold, given him by Queen Elizabeth; his easy-chair; his bed complete; the images that seem to have been posts, and four panels of a triangular form which appear to have made a half-tester, though no longer part of the bedstead; his lantern; his coffer, with some money; his pencil-case; his wife's shoe; a bolt taken from the door of the room; a portrait of him put together from fragments by Dr. Stort, Bishop of Killala."

Such was the inventory made in 1819 by Miss Hawkins, who, with the curiosity of her sex, cross-questioned the widow Hornby as to her income from the donations given by grateful pilgrims for the sight of such precious relics. But, as hinted above, the astute cicerone refused to be drawn; the question of increased rent for the cottage was still in dispute, and she may have suspected her visitor as being in collusion with her exacting landlady. The following year, however, the landlady did finally carry into effect her threat to raise the rent of the birthplace to forty

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pounds a year, with the result that Mrs. Hornby gave up her tenancy and carried off her relics to another house for the "amusement of those Ladies and Gentlemen" who took pleasure in such souvenirs.

As already stated, the Henley Street cottages remained in the possession of descendants of the Shakespeare family until 1806, in which year they were purchased by Thomas Court. When he died twelve years later he bequeathed the property to his wife, and hence it was by a sister widow that Mrs. Hornby was practically driven from the custodianship of the birthplace.

From 1820, then, there were two Richmonds in the field. And it seems probable that for several years the widow Court had good reason to regret the removal of widow Hornby and her relics. For the poetical cicerone had rightly diagnosed the situation; her various "articles of Shakespeare's property" secured her a liberal share of the pilgrim patronage, and to make matters worse for the extortionate widow Court, the new custodian of the birthplace appears to have sadly neglected her charge. Hence a visitor to Stratford

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in 1824 described the Henley Street shrine as "the worst house in the town," which would have been passed by in disgust had it not been for the board outside bearing the legend, "The immortal Shakespeare was born here." That same visitor, however, bore testimony to the increased vogue of the poet, for he said he "met Shakespeare everywhere. The print and book shops have him in all forms."

Three years later there happened an event which did much to reinstate the birthplace in popular favour. This was another of those Shakespeare "Jubilees" which were made fashionable by Garrick's experiment, and once more the term "jubilee" was a misnomer, for the date, 1827, did not correspond to either the natal or death year of the poet. Owing its initiation to the Shakespearean Club of the town, the festival of April 23, 1827, was planned on a gorgeous scale, with an imposing procession of Shakespeare characters impersonated by the members of a theatrical company which was playing in Stratford. Several characters from fourteen of the plays, numbering upwards of forty without counting the

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attendant witches, satyrs, and fairies, marched in the pageant, with Melpomene at the head of the tragic section and Thalia leading on the comedy troupe. There were banners, too, and bands, and St. George on horseback in armour, and a brave array of the Shakespearean Club members marching four abreast and liberally decorated with medals struck for the occasion. A glittering cavalcade, indeed, for the quiet streets of Stratford, which, after perambulating the principal thoroughfares, finally halted before the birthplace, where a hustings had been erected for the climax of the pageant, the crowning of a bust of Shakespeare by Melpomene and Thalia to the accompaniment of an eloquent oration. Thenceforward the Henley Street shrine had nothing to fear from the competition of widow Hornby's miscellaneous collection.

But for many years it was an exceedingly bare shrine in which the pilgrims paid their devotions. That was the condition in which Hawthorne found it in the early years of the second half of the nineteenth century. He reported that the birth-chamber and the entire house were white-

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washed and exceedingly clean, but the only objects on view were "various prints, views of houses, and scenes connected with Shakespeare's memory, together with editions of his works and local publications about his home and haunts." Hawthorne's cicerone was a worthy successor of the widow Hornby, an old lady with the "manners and aspect of a gentlewoman," who talked with "somewhat formidable knowledge and appreciative intelligence about Shakespeare."

As compared with the account penned by his fellow-countryman, Washington Irving, Hawthorne's description of the appearance of the birthplace as he saw it about 1856 is full of minute detail. The house he found almost smaller and humbler than any account would prepare the visitor to expect, while the basement apartment still preserved the butcher's stall with its cleaver-hacked counter. "This lower room," he added, "has a pavement of grey slabs of stone, which may have been rudely squared when the house was new, but are now all cracked, broken, and disarranged in a most unaccountable way. One does not see how any ordinary usage, for

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whatever length of time, should have so smashed these heavy stones ; it is as if an earthquake had burst up through the floor, which afterwards had been imperfectly trodden down again." Ascending to the upper floor, Hawthorne was ushered into the room "in which Shakespeare is supposed to have been born ; though, if you peep too curiously into the matter, you may find the shadow of an ugly doubt on this, as well as most other points of his mysterious life. It is," he continued, "the chamber over the butcher's shop, and is lighted by one broad window containing a great many small, irregular panes of glass. The floor is made of planks, very rudely hewn, and fitting together with little neatness ; the naked beams and rafters, at the sides of the room and overhead, bear the original marks of the builder's broad-axe, with no evidence of an attempt to smooth off the job. Again we have to reconcile ourselves to the smallness of the space enclosed by these illustrious walls—a circumstance more difficult to accept, as regards places that we have heard, read, thought, and dreamed much about, than any other disenchanting particular of a mistaken ideal. A few

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paces—perhaps seven or eight—take us from end to end of it. So low is it that I could easily touch the ceiling, and might have done so without a tiptoe-stretch, had it been a good deal higher; and this humility of the chamber has tempted a vast number of people to write their names overhead in pencil. Every inch of the side walls, even into the obscurest nooks and corners, is covered with a similar record; all the window-panes, moreover, are scrawled with diamond signatures, among which is said to be that of Walter Scott; but so many persons have sought to immortalize themselves in close vicinity to his name that I really could not trace him out.”

Between the “Jubilee” of 1827 and the visit of Hawthorne some twenty-nine years later an important event had transpired in the history of the Henley Street cottages. The widow Court died in 1846, and the question of the future ownership of the premises at once began to engage public attention.

This was the juncture at which the fortunes of the birthplace were threatened by the ubiquitous

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Phineas T. Barnum. That enterprising American showman crops up in the legends of most historic buildings in England. He is credited with a desire to buy them all at some time or other, with the sinister purpose of transplanting them bodily to United States soil. That he had designs upon the famous shrine at Stratford seems beyond dispute ; it would have been the greatest "scoop" of his spectacular career if he could have secured possession of the Shakespeare house and transplanted it to America. And there were some who credited him with the actual achievement of that fact, for some twenty years ago it was confidently affirmed that the birthplace had been removed and was then "somewhere in the United States of America."

But that was an assertion founded on inadequate knowledge. The "somewhere" proved its falsity. Barnum was not the man to hide such an acquisition under a bushel. And as so many erroneous statements have been made concerning the last purchase of the Henley Street property, it may be interesting to give an outline of the true history of that event.

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For the construction of such a history there are two records of first-hand value: one is a copy of the sale-book used by the auctioneer, Edmund Robins, on the day when the property was disposed of, with an interleaved manuscript draft of his speech on that occasion; the other the detailed report of the auction which was printed in the *Morning Post* for September 17, 1847. A comparison of these records with the innumerable accounts hitherto given of the sale of the birthplace shows that, as in so many other matters, first-hand information has been strangely neglected.

It appears, then, that the heir to widow Court's estate at her death in 1846 was a minor, and that his trustee, acting under legal advice, came to the conclusion that he would best serve the interests of his ward by selling the property. A similar transaction had been carried out in 1806 without exciting the outside world; by 1846, however, the value of the birthplace as a literary shrine had been materially enhanced, and it was improbable that it would change owners again for the modest sum—£260—which Thomas Court invested forty

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years earlier. No sooner, then, was it rumoured that the Shakespeare cottages were to be offered for sale than a committee was formed with the object of raising a fund for their purchase on behalf of the nation. To-day such a committee would have an easy task ; sixty-five years ago it was not a light undertaking. For there were sceptics in the land then, obstinate questioners who did not share the "easy faith" of Washington Irving. Consequently when a member of the London Court of Common Council proposed that that body should vote a sum of money towards the purchase of "Shakespeare's House," the reference of the seconder of the motion to the building as "the house in which he was born" was greeted with an emphatic "No, no!" and the proposal was defeated by sixty-nine votes to thirty-eight.

On that very day, at the Mart in London, the sale of the property was completed. It had been announced to take place at "twelve for one precisely," but a few minutes after eleven o'clock the Mart doors were besieged by an excited crowd, and at noon the auction-room was packed "almost

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to suffocation." So dense was the crowd, indeed, that an adjournment had to be made to a larger hall, where Mr. Robins began the sale at "one precisely." His opening address had been carefully prepared and was pitched in a high key appropriate to the occasion. The interest excited by the event, he declared, had not been equalled in the annals of auctions, and he claimed that instead of the contemplated sale being made the subject of reproach it was a matter for congratulation that an opportunity was being openly afforded for the acquisition of "the birthplace of the immortal bard" by the nation. Mr. Robins further protested that he and those for whom he was acting were determined that their conduct in such an important transaction should be thoroughly honourable and as much above suspicion as Cæsar's wife, and he appealed to the Committee to meet them in the same spirit. "As I feel it my duty," he added, "to announce that no fictitious bidding whatever will be made by the vendor or on his behalf, still I claim for him to make, in his capacity of guardian, one bidding during the auction. Should, however, the Com-

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mittee by their agent at their first bidding, which I hope they will do, name the sum they are disposed to give for the property, and should it exceed that which the trustee is advised to bid, I shall at once state the fact and leave the matter in the hands of the public."

Having thus unburdened himself of his lofty-spirited exordium, Mr. Robins descended to more mercenary matters. Apart from its associations with Shakespeare, the property was of considerable commercial value as mere buildings and freehold land; while as a literary shrine its constantly enhancing value was demonstrated by the fact that the yearly total of visitors was ever on the increase. Many of those visitors had "paid large sums for the privilege of sleeping in the room."

Thus far Mr. Robins had been heard with patience and interest; but when he proceeded to dwell upon the authenticity of the birth-room and described it as the veritable chamber in which the illustrious poet "first drew the breath of life" his eloquence was rudely interrupted. In the words of the *Morning Post* reporter, "an individual

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wearing a very formidable pair of moustachios, and whose name was stated to be Jones, here called upon Mr. Robins to prove that Shakespeare was born in that identical room." With ready wit the auctioneer retorted that such a demand reminded him of the story of the person who went to Stratford to see the midwife who officiated at the birth of the poet, and the rejoinder so amused the audience that when the gentleman in the "formidable pair of moustachios" made a second attempt to bring Mr. Robins back to the point, he was shouted down with cries of "To business!"

To business, accordingly, the auctioneer proceeded. And, so far as the buildings were concerned, it was exhausted in three bids. The first offer, which was made apparently by the trustee, was for a thousand pounds; the second, tendered by a Mr. Butler, was for double that sum. But where was Barnum? Was Mr. Butler acting for the famous showman, or was he present in person in the guise of the individual "whose name was stated to be Jones"? This is another Shakespearean mystery which awaits solution.

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In any case, no sooner had Mr. Butler, whether acting for himself or Barnum, made his bid of two thousand pounds than a memorandum was handed to Mr. Robins stating that the Committee was prepared to give three thousand pounds for the property. "Immense cheers," recorded the *Morning Post* reporter, "followed the reading of this document, coupled with derisive laughter at the expense of the gentleman in moustachios, who afterwards offered two thousand pounds." Without waiting for further bids, Mr. Robins clinched the offer of the Committee with the fall of his hammer, and with that resounding tap on September 16, 1847, the Henley Street home of Shakespeare passed for all time into the possession of the British nation.

Sixty-five years, then, have elapsed since the Stratford shrine became national property. And if Hawthorne could revisit it to-day he would have much difficulty in recognizing in the smoothly restored and trimly kept building the original of that humble edifice which he described in "Our Old Home," while Washington Irving would utterly fail to identify it with the "mean-

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looking " cottage of his pilgrimage, and the diarist of 1824 could no longer describe it as " the worst house in the town." What is true, too, of the exterior appearance of the birthplace may also be affirmed of the interior. The various rooms are no longer "squalid " or merely whitewashed ; and the vacuity noted by Hawthorne has given place to a somewhat bewildering collection of objects which are aptly characterized as " miscellaneous " by Sir Sidney Lee.

Unfortunately few of those three hundred and fifty objects have more than an allusive connexion with Shakespeare. Although the present trustees of the birthplace exercise considerable discrimination in their purchases and acceptance of additions, their earliest predecessors were little disposed to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Not that any relic now shown makes so severe a strain on credulity as some of the objects shown by the widow Hornby, such as the poet's christening bowl or his wife's shoe ; but candour prompts the wish that the trustees were less confident in their official ascriptions of some of their treasures. There is that ring, for example, in the Museum

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which is catalogued as "Shakespeare's gold finger-ring," but of which the most that can be said is that it is probably a gentleman's ring of the Elizabethan period. There is not a particle of solid evidence to prove that it was once the property of the poet. More reticence, too, is desirable on the part of those cicerones who point to an oak desk from the Grammar School as "Shakespeare's desk," for there again adequate authority is lacking, just as there is nothing to establish the authenticity of the "round oak box made of wood from Shakespeare's pew."

Many of the objects shown in the Museum, however, have the attractive quality of atmosphere. That is, they date indubitably from the England of Shakespeare's days. Among such are the cast of the face of Sir Thomas Lucy from his monument in Charlecote Church, the various coins of Elizabeth's reign, and the collection of early editions of the plays. But it is the documents, the deeds and wills and conveyances and records of lawsuits, and the private letters which make least demand on the "easy faith" which is more rare to-day than in the credulous age of Washing-

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ton Irving. Those time-stained scraps of vellum or paper are their own evidence, and among them all the one of most absorbing interest is that brief epistle from Richard Quayney to his "Loveinge good Frend and countreymann mr. Wm. Shackspeare" which is the only letter addressed to the poet of which there is any knowledge.

When, then, all deductions have been made, and the scientific spirit placated to the full, the residuum of interest attaching to the Henley Street cottages is sufficient to warrant the devotion of literary pilgrims. In one or other of those buildings Shakespeare undoubtedly spent the years of his boyhood and early manhood; wherever he was born, it was in Henley Street he had his home before setting out on his high adventure in London; and it is no meagre satisfaction for the hero-worshipping instinct that the rooms which once echoed to his childish laughter contain several of those quarto editions of his plays which were printed in his own lifetime. And for the rest, the peaceful little garden in the rear of the poet's house is richly sown with descendants of those fruits and flowers which have acquired

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an added fame through many allusions in his deathless lines. His memory is enshrined for ever in "the lily's white" and "the deep vermilion of the rose."

CHAPTER II : NEW PLACE

WASHINGTON IRVING was so fascinated by Stratford-on-Avon that six years after the poetical pilgrimage described in his "Sketch-Book" he paid a second visit to the town. It was on that occasion he penned the lines the original autograph of which is preserved among the treasures of the birth-place :

*"Of mighty Shakespeare's birth the room we see ;
That where he died in vain to find we try.
Useless the search :—for all Immortal He,
And those who are Immortal never die."*

Six years, then, had wrought no change in his "easy faith" ; he still accepted the apartment in the Henley Street cottage as the veritable birth-chamber of the poet ; and his allusion to the scene of Shakespeare's death seems to suggest that he knew nothing of New Place and its interesting associations. In the "Sketch-Book," indeed, Irving recorded how he passed from the

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birthplace of the poet to his grave, with never a reference to the site of that house which was connected with the fruition of his fortunes and was the place of his death. Strangely enough, too, Stratford's other famous American pilgrim, Nathaniel Hawthorne, was guilty of the same oversight nearly half a century later, for he also wrote that "from Shakespeare's house the next step, of course, is to visit his burial-place."

And yet such an order of pilgrimage ignores the most interesting spot in Stratford—that vacant plot of ground where once stood the building in which the poet spent the last few years of his life as an honoured and wealthy citizen of his native town. No doubt the grave of Shakespeare is a firm fact for which, amid so much shifting ground, the pilgrim must be duly grateful; but, as compared with the conflicting legends of the birthplace, the documentary evidence which connects the dramatist with New Place is of such an assured nature that even its houseless site is a haunt of surpassing interest.

Such, no doubt, Irving and Hawthorne would have thought it had they been aware first of its





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existence and then of the memories it suggests. They may not have been ignorant of the first ; of the second they were naturally oblivious, seeing that at the time of their visits J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps had not given to the world that painstaking volume in which, at the cost of so much zealous research, he was able to set forth the full extent of Shakespeare's association with New Place.

Although the poet's ownership of the house naturally overshadows every other incident of its history, its annals prior and subsequent to that event were more remarkable than is usually the case with a modest mansion in a quiet country town. All told, that history embraced a period of nearly three centuries, for the original building makes an appearance in documentary records so long ago as 1483, and its successor was not finally demolished until 1759.

For the pilgrim of to-day, then, the objective next in order to the birthplace is that vacant lot at the corner of Chapel Street and Chapel Lane where the New Place mansion once stood. The frontage, which is somewhat narrow, is on Chapel

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Street, and is adjoined to the north by an ancient building known as Nash's House ; in its depth the site extends eastward down Chapel Lane for a considerable distance. The whole is shut off from the public thoroughfares by an ornamental iron railing, which is, however, broken by a gateway a little distance down Chapel Lane. That gateway marks approximately the dividing line between the small garden at the rear of the house and the great garden which stretched eastward in the direction of the Avon.

And another feature of the gateway in the garden of New Place is that it is the only entrance to a Shakespeare shrine in the town which may be passed without paying a monetary toll. Such an exception deserves to be recorded in letters of gold. A small Stratford boy who accompanied the present writer on some of his wanderings bore unconscious testimony to the spirit of the place. "I don't agree," said he, "with all the fuss people make about that Shakespeare." "Why?" "Well, look at the lot of money he gets!" That he was astonished when he learnt that the aforesaid Shakespeare was dead does not blunt the

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point of his impeachment. Certainly a "lot of money" is demanded in the name of the poet. All who have a sense of the fitness of things must rejoice to learn that a discerning American has christened Stratford as "the sixpenny town." There is no getting away from that sixpenny fee. If the pilgrim wishes to visit the birthplace the charge is sixpence; if he desires to inspect the museum under the same roof he must hand out another sixpence; if he would walk over the site of New Place the cry is still sixpence; if he would enter the Memorial Theatre he cannot do it under sixpence; if he wanders out to Anne Hathaway's cottage the sixpenny tribute pursues him still. It is not the amount, but the constant iteration which is so wearisome. If the fee must be retained, why cannot the trustees come to an arrangement whereby each pilgrim will be able to purchase the freedom of the town for a specific sum and be rid of the whole sordid business in one transaction?

Even New Place, as noted above, is tainted by the blight of that sixpenny toll to a certain extent; that is, the small and great gardens at the rear are divided by a fence running parallel to the

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gateway on Chapel Lane, and the ground to the west of that fence may not be trodden unless the sixpenny tribute is forthcoming.

But, that justice may be done, let it be admitted that, so far as the grounds of New Place are concerned, the pilgrim who pays nothing has the advantage of him who pays sixpence. He can, an he list, overlook the site of Shakespeare's last home to his heart's content, carefully con the broken outlines of its foundations, note the position of the poet's well, and, if he have the gift of imagination, conjure up a vision of the sweet bard of Avon in his sunset days; and then he can turn away to wander at his will along the trim paths and among the shaven lawns and radiant flower-beds which represent to-day that leafy pleasance which was once the dramatist's great garden. It is an ideal retreat for an hour's meditation. From various points of view the eye catches glimpses of quaint gables of ancient houses or the old grey tower of the Guild Chapel, while the shrubs and trees and flowers might be the lineal descendants of those planted by Shakespeare's own hand. Nay, on the edge of one

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velvety lawn there stands the gnarled and aged trunk which is said to be the scion of the poet's own famous mulberry-tree.

In another corner have been erected some time-stained pillars which once adorned an ancient building of the town, and near by is a stone tablet inscribed with a closely written legend. This legend, which purports to be an extract from a work entitled "The Acts and Monuments of the Fairies," is a decree of King Oberon addressed to such of his loving subjects as were accustomed to hold their revels in the poet's garden.

"And whereas," so the decree runs, "by the wilful and malicious destruction of the said mulberry-tree, as before recited, and other damage at New Place, late the mortal residence of the said William Shakespeare of immortal memory, the sports and recreations of our good subjects have been grievously disturbed and interrupted, now we, taking the same into our serious consideration, have ordered and ordained, and by these presents do order and ordain, that the said sports and recreations formerly kept and held by our good people under the said mulberry-tree do

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forthwith cease at the place where the said mulberry-tree stood, and that from thenceforth they be duly celebrated and observed with accustomed rites in the piece of ground next thereunto adjoining, being part or parcel of the terrestrial estate of the said William Shakespeare, and now belonging to our beloved William Hunt, of whose affection for us and our people we have undoubted assurance, so likewise of his care to cultivate the same with all manner of productions agreeable to us, and to cause the same to be laid in proper places with clean and close-binding gravel, and the grass thereof to be greatly and frequently mowed for the better accommodation of our good subjects in celebrating the said rites; and our royal will and pleasure further is that a part of the said ground lying nearest to the river Avon, and appropriated hereby to the celebration of the said rites, shall henceforth be called Fairy Lawn, and that a fair pedestal or table of stone shall be erected in the centre of the said lawn, and an inscription, recording our affection and regard for the said William Shakespeare and our determination herein, engraven thereon."

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This pleasant conceit originated in the brain of the Rev. Richard Jago, vicar of that Snitterfield parish in which Shakespeare's father was born, and was sent by him in 1778 to his friend William Hunt, town clerk of Stratford, who at that time rented the poet's great garden at New Place. Doubtless the reverend allegorist little anticipated that his fable would one day adorn a "fair pedestal" in Shakespeare's garden, but there it stands to-day, mutely eloquent of a fantasy which would surely have found favour with the creator of King Oberon.

And other pleasant memories of the sweet bard of Avon are suggested by the thought that somewhere in the great garden of New Place once stood the orchard which Shakespeare is credited with planting in 1602. "The bare fact would interest little," noted a close student of the dramas, "did not his pomological labours affect his literary work. If we scan his plays up to 1597 and after 1604, we find that the outdoor scenes are laid in forests, parks, gardens, woods, and terraces. The orchard is mentioned twice in 'Romeo and Juliet,' 1593, and the final scene of

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'King John,' 1595, is laid in the orchard of Swinstead Abbey (the situation in this instance is taken from the 'Troublesome History'); but in nearly all the plays written between the years named some scenes are laid or there are frequent references to orchards. In '2 Henry IV,' 1598, 'His lordship is walked forth into the orchard'; later in the same play Shallow proudly offers to show Falstaff his orchard. Some of the scenes in that delightful comedy 'Much Ado about Nothing,' 1600, are enacted in Leonato's orchard; it is in the pleached bower where honeysuckles ripen in the sun that Beatrice is so cunningly duped. 'As You Like It,' 1600, opens in an orchard, and 'Twelfth Night,' 1601, has some incidents in fruit-tree territory. In 'Hamlet,' 1602, twice it is stated that it was 'while sleeping in mine orchard' that Hamlet's father met his fate; in Brutus's orchard ('Julius Cæsar,' 1604) the conspiritors met and planned one of the big assassinations of the world; and, finally, in 'Troilus and Cressida,' 1606, in Pandarus's orchard, the Trojan wins the love of the false Cressida. The emphatic use of the possessive

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pronoun offers a style of evidence not convincing, indeed, but still indicating Shakespeare's pride of possession; and his system of utilization—'walking in the thick pleached alley in my orchard,' 'nay, you shall see my orchard,' and the duplex 'mine' in 'Hamlet'—is significant, considering that Hamlet's father in the 'Hystorie' is taken off by the sword and in his own palace. These were the most cheerful days of his life, if the spirit of these orchard plays reflects the mind of their creator. Love of nature, admiration of country, joy of living, loving, laughing, peep out in all these works. Shakespeare was always a profound humorist, but here the fun is boisterous, far removed from the prescribed bondage of urban jollification. . . . One can readily believe that he spent much of his time in his orchard. 'In my chamber-window lies a book; bring it hither to me in my orchard.' What more delightful symposium might we desire than an hour in the 'pleached bower' with Shakespeare, and the offer 'of a last year's pippin of my own grafting'?"

One of the strangest facts in the history of New

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Place is that it did not make any great figure in the annals of the poet until the last house built on the site had been demolished and the Shakespeare mulberry-tree cut down. Dugdale's silence as to the birthplace of Shakespeare has already been noted; he was equally unobservant of the house in which he died. Nay, to be strictly accurate, he did devote a few lines to the house when he visited Stratford in 1653, but failed to connect the building with the dramatist. In his references to the Guild Chapel he wrote that to the north of that structure stood "a fair house of brick and timber," the erection of which he attributed to Sir Hugh Clopton, and this was none other than the New Place mansion in which Shakespeare had breathed his last thirty-seven years earlier.

Locally, of course, the fact of the poet's ownership of New Place was well known, and in a plan of Stratford drawn in 1759 the house is indicated as the "place where died Shakespeare." That, however, was not literally true, as will appear presently, but it was the common belief, and was accepted as a fact by the lady who was the first

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to announce the destruction of the poet's mulberry-tree to the outside world. It was in 1760 that the lady in question, being on a visit to Stratford, wrote as follows to a friend in Kent: "There stood here till lately the house in which Shakespeare lived, and a mulberry-tree of his planting; the house was large, strong, and handsome; the tree so large that it would shade the grass-plot in your garden, which I think is more than twenty yards square, and supply the whole town with mulberries every year. As the curiosity of this house and tree brought much fame, and more company and profit to the town, a certain man, on some disgust, has pulled the house down, so as not to leave one stone upon another, and cut down the tree, and piled it as a stack of firewood, to the great vexation, loss, and disappointment of the inhabitants; however, an honest silversmith bought the whole stack of wood, and makes many odd things of this wood for the curious, some of which I hope to bring with me to town."

Now the "certain man" who perpetrated that dual vandalism was of course the Rev. Francis Gastrell, who became the owner of New Place in

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1756. He is the Judas Iscariot of Shakespearean biography. Until recent years, when more accurate knowledge has supplanted careless legend, he was the Anathema Maran-atha of every devotee of the poet, for on his luckless head was piled the heavy mountain of opprobrium of having ruthlessly torn down the indubitable house in which Shakespeare spent his last peaceful years and laid him down to die.

No doubt the reverend iconoclast of New Place was a disagreeable, or at least an irritable, person. The testimony on that point seems too clear to be gainsaid. And it would appear that Mrs. Gastrell shared his failing, for, according to Malone, she was "little better than a fiend," and is credited with having played a prominent part in the destruction of the famous mulberry-tree. Which-ever of the two, however, was guilty of what Boswell called the "Gothic barbarity" of felling that tree, neither the one nor the other can be justly charged with razing Shakespeare's house. For, as a matter of fact, that building had been demolished more than fifty years before Mr. Gastrell became the owner of New Place. The

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evidence on this point is beyond dispute ; if any one is to be execrated for destroying the house in which the poet lived and died it is that Sir John Clopton who, about the year 1700, pulled down the original structure and replaced it with a more modern building as a kind of wedding gift to his son Hugh.

Reduced, then, to rigid accuracy, the count against the Rev. Francis amounts to this : the house he destroyed was merely the successor of that in which Shakespeare died, while as to the mulberry-tree the evidence that it was actually planted by the poet is in no link stronger than tradition.

As the mulberry-tree crops up as persistently in the biographies of Shakespeare as King Charles's head in Mr. Dick's petition, it may be interesting to winnow the facts from the fiction as far as that is possible. To begin with, then, it seems established beyond dispute that there is no reference to the existence of the tree of a date prior to its destruction ; only after it was "piled as a stack of firewood" did it emerge from the obscurity in which it had been hidden for so many years. Even then

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the farthest-back date in its history reached no nearer Shakespeare's time than the year 1744. It was the actor Macklin who, in 1788, when he was in his eighty-eighth year, asserted that he had been entertained under the famous tree by Sir Hugh Clopton in 1744. Another witness sometimes cited was one named Hugh Taylor, a native of Stratford, who in 1790, when he was eighty-five years old, claimed that in his boyhood the legend that the tree was planted by Shakespeare was generally believed in the town, and that he had often partaken of its fruit. Both these witnesses, however, did not come forward with their testimony until after the tree had been cut down.

Their evidence, combined with much of a similar nature, is conclusive on the point that many years before the middle of the eighteenth century the planting of the tree by Shakespeare was accepted in Stratford as a fact, but that belief was based solely upon the assertion of that member of the Clopton family who owned New Place from the early years of the century. Beyond that point there is no record of the legend.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, how-

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ever, the mulberry-tree was regarded as one of the most valuable assets of the town. It was, as we have seen, a curiosity which brought "much fame and more company and profit" to Stratford. Consequently when the Rev. Francis had it destroyed he at once became the most unpopular man in the town, and the boys gave point to the general indignation by breaking his windows. "The people of Stratford were seized with grief and astonishment when they were informed of the sacrilegious deed; and nothing less than the destruction of the offender in the first transports of their rage would satisfy them. The miserable culprit was forced to skulk up and down to save himself from the rage of the Stratfordians; he was obliged at last to leave the town amidst the curses of the populace, who solemnly vowed never to suffer one of the same name to reside in Stratford." Ten years later Mr. Gastrell still retained a vivid and resentful recollection of those exciting days. "I shall hardly ever," he wrote, "entertain any thoughts of returning to a place where I have been so maltreated."

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As the reverend tree-feller never offered any justification or excuse of his "Gothic barbarity," it is difficult to divine his motive for destroying a relic which was held in such superlative veneration. Dr. Johnson's theory was that he did it to "vex his neighbours," but the explanation of Halliwell-Phillipps is more reasonable and charitable. "Several accounts agree in stating that the tree had attained a great magnitude, with overhanging boughs, the trunk being in a state of decay, and, indeed, it is most probable that a tree of a century and a half's growth would have been of a very considerable size, the soil of Stratford being peculiarly favourable to the luxurious growth of the mulberry. If planted at all near the house, its boughs would certainly have overshadowed some of the rooms at the back. Now Davies, in his 'Life of Garrick,' the first edition of which appeared in 1780, and was probably written in the previous year, expressly asserts that 'the mulberry-tree planted by the poet's own hand became an object of dislike to this tasteless owner of it, because it overshadowed his window, and rendered the house, as he thought, subject to

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damp and moisture.' Here is a plausible reason given for the removal of the tree, which may have been accomplished somewhat thoughtlessly, without a full idea of the indignation the act would excite at Stratford; or it is not impossible, alas! that the tree was in such a state of decay that its removal was considered by Gastrell an act merely briefly anticipating its natural extinction."

Whatever the actual motive for the felling of the tree, its demolition was not an unmixed evil for some natives of the town. With that instinct for turning Shakespeare to pecuniary advantage which is still possessed in large measure by so many Stratfordians, several contemporaries of the Gastrell era immediately recognized the golden possibilities which lay dormant in that pile of mulberry-tree logs. Thus one picturesque story affirms that the silversmith, Thomas Sharp by name, who purchased the tree did so for the purpose of utilizing it as firewood, but was awakened to its value by the remark of a friend to the effect that it would be more profitable to carve it into souvenirs. Sharp himself, however,

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was wont to affirm that it was his "sincere veneration for the memory of its celebrated planter" which prompted him to purchase the tree and work it into "many curious toys and useful articles."

His industry in the employment appears to have been as inexhaustible as the supply of wood. The latter had the recuperative quality of the widow's cruse. It has been calculated that there is enough wood of the "true Cross" in existence to build a battleship; another calculation might disclose that Shakespeare's mulberry-tree contained sufficient lumber to have equipped all the half-timber houses of his native town. Mulberry-tree relics, carved into goblets and ink-stands and boxes and tea-chests and tobacco-stoppers and standishes, poured from Sharp's workshop in such an increasing stream that within a few years of the destruction of the tree he was accused of using spurious wood. He repelled the charge with indignation, and the supply of relics flowed on as before; and when Garrick superintended the "Jubilee" of 1769 he bore a steward's wand made from the prolific tree and was adorned with a medallion

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portrait of the poet carved on a piece of the same inexhaustible material. Nay, the supply had not ceased fifty years after Sharp's happy purchase; for the remarkable John Ange, who assured Washington Irving that he had assisted in felling the miraculous tree, still possessed a fragment which he offered to sell to the American pilgrim! Well might Garrick sing:

*"All shall yield to the Mulberry-Tree,
Bend to Thee,
Blest Mul-berry."*

As already recorded, a veteran mulberry-tree still stands in the great garden of New Place for which the claim is made that it is a scion of the one planted by Shakespeare; and another, a supposed grand-scion, may be found in the little garden of New Place site. But, unfortunately, their genealogy is open to suspicion, for Robert B. Whaler, the careful historian of Stratford, was of the opinion that the old tree was not perpetuated, adding: "Many people are willing enough to affirm their own as a scion from the

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celebrated tree, but unfortunately their tales are foolish and improbable when examined." But the great garden of New Place has sufficient merits of its own, especially for the devotee who muses therein in the spirit which prompted Malone to write :

*"In this retreat our Shakespeare's godlike mind
With matchless skill surveyed all human kind.
Here let each sweet that blest Arabia knows,
'Flowers of all hues, and without thorn the
 rose,'
To latest times their balmy odours fling,
And Nature here display eternal spring."*

Shakespeare's connexion with New Place began in 1597, at which date the house was fully a hundred years old. The earliest owner of whom there is any record was that Sir John Clopton, the wealthy mercer who became Lord Mayor of London in 1491, who was so generous a benefactor to his native town of Stratford, for the reference in his will to his "grete house in Stratford-upon-Avon," when taken in conjunction with the

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inquisition made on the death of the knight, makes it clear that the "grete house" and New Place were one and the same building. For our first description of the edifice we are indebted to the pen of John Leland, the antiquary, who visited Stratford about 1540, and when referring to the Guild Chapel noted that "this Hugh Clopton builded also by the north syde of this chappell a praty house of bricke and tymbre." Some three years after Leland's visit this "pretty house of brick and timber" was leased for forty years to Dr. Thomas Bentley, who was physician to Henry VIII, and who, on his death about 1549, left the remainder of the lease to his wife on the condition that she did not marry again. The bequest was not of any great value, for at the time of Dr. Bentley's death the house was in "great ruyne and decay and unrepayryd"; that his widow did not esteem it in comparison with the attractions of second wifehood may be inferred from the fact that she soon married again.

By this time the "grete house" of Sir Hugh Clopton's will and the "praty house" of Leland

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was known as New Place, for it appears under that name in the legal documents which were occasioned by the widow Bentley's marriage; consequently there is no foundation for the statement so often made that it was Shakespeare who christened the property "New Place." Two other owners intervened between the Bentleys and the poet, Willian Bott and William Underhill, and it was with the latter that, early in 1597, William Shakespeare came to an agreement to purchase the property, described as consisting of one messuage and two barns and two gardens, for the sum of sixty pounds.

Only eleven years had passed since, a young man of some twenty-two summers, the eldest son of John Shakespeare had started for London in quest of fortune. And now he is back again purchasing what was perhaps the most considerable house in Stratford. How had he achieved such rapid success?

Nothing more than a brief answer to that question need be attempted. It will be remembered that tradition described the young Shakespeare as finding his first employment in

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London at the doors of theatres, where he took charge of the horses of the playgoers, and one of his biographers has agreed that there is "no inherent improbability" in the story. Another version credits the young Stratfordian with such efficiency in this horse-tending business that he speedily became so much a favourite as prompted him to hire a band of lads who, when "Will Shakespeare" was called for, immediately presented themselves with the statement, "I am Shakespeare's boy, sir." This tale, however, is dismissed as "apocryphal" by the biographer who sees no "inherent improbability" in the balder version. Yet there have been plenty of modern instances, in America if not in England, of sharp-witted but poor youths who have risen to wealth in theatredom by enterprise not vastly different from that which is said to have given the young Shakespeare his first foothold on the ladder of fortune.

Anyway, it is beyond dispute that soon after arriving in London he formed some kind of connexion with the playhouse, from which he went on to his triumphs as an actor and then as a

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dramatist. And in eleven years he had obviously been able to amass sufficient capital to warrant him becoming the purchaser of New Place.

As Sir Sidney Lee has reminded us, too many gratuitous difficulties have been imported into the question of Shakespeare's financial prosperity. He concludes that the nineteen plays which may be set to the poet's credit between 1591 and 1599 cannot have produced less than two hundred pounds, or some twenty pounds a year, and that takes no account of his earnings as an actor. Now, that the stage was a profitable occupation at the close of the sixteenth century seems beyond question. There is a reference in the university play of "The Return from Parnassus" which, especially in its last line, may be taken as stating the case of Shakespeare. One of the speakers, a poor student, makes an envious complaint of the wealth by which actors were rewarded :

*"England affords these glorious vagabonds,
That carried erst their fardles on their backs,
Coursers to ride on through the gazing streets,*

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*Sweeping it in their glaring satin suits,
And pages to attend their masterships :
With mouthing words that better wits had framed,
They purchase lands and now esquires are made."*

Altogether, then, Sir Sidney Lee computes that the income of Shakespeare from his plays and earnings as an actor averaged a hundred and thirty pounds a year prior to 1599, and he adds that such a sum, equal in value to a thousand pounds in modern times, would be regarded as a very large income in a country town. "According to the author of 'Ratsei's Ghost,'" comments the same judicial authority, "the actor, who may well have been meant for Shakespeare, practised in London a strict frugality, and there seems no reason why Shakespeare should not have been able in 1597 to draw from his savings sixty pounds wherewith to buy New Place. His resources might well justify his fellow-townsmen's opinion of his wealth in 1598, and suffice between 1597 and 1599 to meet his expenses, in rebuilding the house, stocking the barns with grain, and conducting various legal proceedings. But, according to tradition, he had in

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the Earl of Southampton a wealthy and generous friend who on one occasion gave him a large gift of money to enable 'him to go through with' a purchase to which he had a mind. A munificent gift, added to professional gain, leaves nothing unaccounted for in Shakespeare's position before 1599."

After the date last mentioned the poet's fortune grew apace, for he became a shareholder in the Globe Theatre and also had some financial interest in the Blackfriars Theatre. In the sum total, then, it is estimated that during the latter portion of his life Shakespeare's income amounted to more than six hundred pounds a year. Indeed, a seventeenth-century vicar of Stratford remarked that in his closing years the poet "spent at the rate of a thousand a year, as I have heard." Documents still survive which afford ample proof of the conviction of his fellow-townsmen that he was a man of substantial wealth from the time when he became the owner of New Place.

Although he completed the transaction for the purchase of New Place in 1602, Shakespeare did

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not immediately sever his connexion with London and settle down in his native town. He seems to have disposed of his interest in the Globe and Blackfriars theatres about 1611, but continued for two or three years longer to pay frequent visits to the capital. No doubt he found it difficult to bid a final farewell to the scenes of his triumphs as an actor and playwright. So far as Stratford was concerned, he may be safely credited with the sentiment which Goldsmith attributed to the native of "sweet Auburn":

*"And as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexation past,
Here to return—and die at home at last";*

but the spell of London was strong upon him; the provincialism of Stratford must have been irksome at times in contrast with the literary and theatrical Bohemianism of the capital; and hence it is not surprising that he did not thoroughly settle down at New Place until 1614.

And at that date he had barely two years

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to live. They were spent, said an early biographer, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. One of his daughters, the elder, Susannah, was already the wife of Dr. John Hall and the mother of his only granddaughter, Elizabeth ; the other, Judith, was married in February 1616 to Thomas Quiney, a son of one of the poet's early friends. From legal records, and deeds of conveyance, and wills, and entries in the minutes of the Stratford Corporation, it is possible to catch a few fleeting glimpses of the master of New Place during the last two or three years of his life : he is seen supporting his elder daughter in an action prompted by a charge of slander, or adding to his real estate by the purchase of property in London, or entertaining a Puritan preacher at New Place, or receiving a bequest of five pounds under the will of a friend ; but for the greater part mystery broods over those closing years.

For a moment, however, in January 1616, the veil is lifted. On the sixteenth day of that month the poet was closeted with a solicitor engaged in the serious business of arranging

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the terms of his will. That document, which contains, apart from the signatures, the only two words in Shakespeare's handwriting known to be in existence, has been the theme of endless discussion, and was once described as being "absolutely void of the least particle of that spirit which animated our great poet." That critic, as Halliwell-Phillipps suggested, evidently expected to find the will written in blank-verse. "To less exacting persons that document is of great interest for the evidence it gives of the poet's practical nature and the light it throws on his relations with his family and friends. It makes manifest, for example, that the chief place in his affections was held by his elder daughter, Susannah Hall, for it was to her he bequeathed the bulk of his property, including 'that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called the New Place, wherein I now dwell.' There were liberal bequests, too, to his younger daughter, Judith, to his sister, Joan Hart, to his three nephews, to his granddaughter, to the poor of Stratford, and to seven friends he left twenty-six shillings and eightpence

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each for the purchase of memorial rings. He remembered, in short, everybody with the exception of Anne Hathaway, the wife of his youth; hence the afterthought of that famous interlineation by which she became entitled to his 'second best bed with the furniture.'"

What did that afterthought portend? Did it mean that the early love of William Shakespeare for Anne Hathaway had cooled to indifference, that husband and wife had drifted apart and were now linked to one another by nothing more substantial than that mockery of a loveless marriage—a wedding certificate; or did it imply that the poet thought his wife amply provided for by her legal widow's dower and distrusted her ability to take charge of his estate? Both theories have had their heated adherents, and the problem will probably be discussed with undiminished warmth to the end of time.

In support of the estrangement theory many arguments have been adduced. Anne Hathaway was her husband's senior by some eight years, and the disparity of age has been adduced as a probable reason for the dying-down of

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Shakespeare's love. Into some lines of his own, then, a personal significance has been read :

*"Let still the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart."*

Again, not only was the bequest of the second best bed an afterthought, but the will is wholly barren of any reference to the Hathaway kindred.

But on the opposite count it is claimed that bedsteads were elaborate and valuable pieces of furniture in the seventeenth century, that they often figure in wills of the period; and one ingenious theorist suggests that the bequest was of that identical bed which the bride's family presented to the couple on their marriage. It is also argued that the tradition that Shakespeare's widow expressed a desire to be buried in her husband's grave is presumptive proof against the estrangement theory.

Two of the anecdotes told of the poet are of a kind which suggest that he may have been guilty

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of marital unfaithfulness. One, which was an ale-house story in London in 1602, may be given in the words of its first chronicler: "Upon a time, when Burbage played Richard III, there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him, that before she went from the play, she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard the Third. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, was entertained, and at his game ere Burbage came. Then, message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that 'William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third.'" The other anecdote is that which credits the poet with the paternity of Sir William D'Avenant, whose mother, a beautiful woman and of "very light report," was the wife of that John D'Avenant who kept the inn at Oxford where Shakespeare baited on his journey to London. Such is the sum of the matter; the discerning reader may be left to draw his own conclusions.

But when Shakespeare, in a cosy room in New Place on that January day of 1616, discussed with

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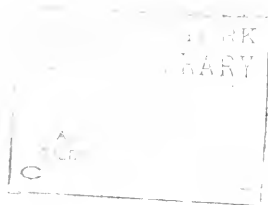
his solicitor the terms of his "last will and testament," he was nearly finished with all the temptations to which male flesh is heir. On that day, it is true, he was in "perfect health and memory, God be thanked"; but two months later he was taken with so serious an illness that he thought it expedient to have the rough draft of his will revised and witnessed without further delay. And a month later, on April 23, 1616, he passed away in his fifty-third year.

What exactly was the nature of the illness which put so untimely an end to the life of the poet is another of those mysteries which enshroud so much of his career. The only account which has come down to us was penned some fifty-six years after the dramatist's death by the vicar of Stratford, who made this brief entry in his diary: "Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted." On this story, a legend in itself, realistic details have been embroidered, such as that the poet "tumbled into a ditch on his way home, and died there." Sir Sidney Lee decides that the tales of

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Shakespeare's achievements as a hard drinker "may be dismissed as unproven"; but even so stout a hero-worshipper as Halliwell-Phillipps was inclined to accept the "merry meeting" legend, with extenuating circumstances.

Briefly put, Halliwell-Phillipps accounted for the poet's early death by a conjunction of strong drink and strong odours. "The cause of the malady," he noted, "then attributed to undue festivity, would now be readily discernible in the wretched sanitary conditions surrounding his residence. If truth, and not romance, is to be invoked, were there the woodbine and sweet honey-suckle within reach of the poet's death-bed, their fragrance would have been neutralized by their vicinity to middens, fetid water-courses, mud-walls, and piggeries." And in support of that indictment the same patient student produced a series of entries from the town records which present an alarming and malodorous picture of the filthy condition of Chapel Lane in days anterior and posterior to the poet's lifetime. The references to gutter and muck and dunghills and fetid ditches seem to exhale the concentrated





INSIDE THE SITE OF NEW PLACE

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essence of every vile effluvium known to man, and suggest a hot-bed of virulent typhus. And it must be remembered that Chapel Lane ran alongside Shakespeare's house and garden at New Place. Some of the inhabitants of the lane, and probably the poet among the number, protested vigorously to the corporation in 1613 against a pending addition to their many offensive nuisances; and even so late as the end of the eighteenth century the thoroughfare was still one of the dirtiest in a town not remarkable for cleanliness. It may well have been, then, that the surroundings of New Place, now so well kept and verdant and fragrant, were accountable for Shakespeare's death.

Those pilgrims who are curious enough to wish to walk over the vacant site of the poet's residence, at the cost of the sixpenny toll above mentioned, are given access to it through that picturesque building which borders it on the north known as Nash's House. In that ancient structure, which was once the home of Shakespeare's granddaughter, are preserved some curious relics of Elizabethan times. But the

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chief interest of the house, apart from its outlook on the New Place foundations, is that its oak-beamed ceilings and its spacious chimney-nooks are potent aids to the imagination in repicturing the domestic environments amid which Stratford's most famous son spent his last peaceful years.

CHAPTER III : THE CHURCH

BY an inversion which is an excellent example of the modern spirit, the twentieth-century pilgrim to Stratford-on-Avon usually visits last that shrine which early devotees made the sole object of their quest. Washington Irving and Hawthorne, as has been remarked, ignored New Place and went straight to the church from the Henley Street cottage; Dugdale and other forerunners were interested only in the poet's grave. The modern order of pilgrimage is the most seemly, just as it is also a tribute to our greater knowledge of Shakespeare's life. The natural sequence is surely that which takes the birthplace first, New Place second, and the grave last.

Many pens have attempted word-pictures of Holy Trinity Church, but in the entire gallery pride of place may still be given to those achieved by Irving and Hawthorne. "A large and venerable pile," Irving described it, "mouldering with age, but richly ornamented. It stands on

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the banks of the Avon, on an embowered point, and separated by adjoining gardens from the suburbs of the town. Its situation is quiet and retired ; the river runs murmuring at the foot of the churchyard, and the elms which grow upon its banks droop their branches into its clear bosom. An avenue of limes, the boughs of which are curiously interlaced, so as to form in summer an arched way of foliage, leads up from the gate of the yard to the church porch. The graves are overgrown with grass ; the grey tombstones, some of them nearly sunk into the earth, are half-covered with moss, which has likewise tinted the reverend old buildings. Small birds have built their nests among the cornices and fissures of the walls, and keep up a continual flutter and chirping ; and rooks are sailing and cawing about its lofty grey spire."

Hawthorne, too, was not less happy in limning the outward aspect of the poet's resting-place. " The appearance of the church is most venerable and beautiful, standing amid a great green shadow of lime-trees, above which rises the spire, while the Gothic battlements and buttresses and vast

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arched windows are obscurely seen through the boughs. The Avon loiters past the churchyard, an exceedingly sluggish river, which might seem to have been considering which way it should flow ever since Shakespeare left off paddling in it and gathering the large forget-me-nots that grow among its flags and water-weeds."

That the Avon should have been pressed into the service of the eulogists of the poet is a natural consequence of the close association of that charming river with the beginning and end of his wonderful career. Garrick, in the facile verse which he indited in connexion with his "Jubilee," prophesied that not even the Thames would "more harmonious flow in song," and expressed the aspiration

*"Ever may thy stream
Of tuneful numbers be the darling theme."*

And then he piped his "shepherd's feeble notes" to the following effect, excusing the weakness of his numbers by the warmth of his zeal :

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*"Thou soft-flowing Avon, by thy silver stream
Of things more than mortal, sweet Shakespeare would
dream,*

*The Fairies by moonlight dance round his green bed,
For hallow'd the turf is which pillow'd his head.*

*"The love-stricken maiden, the soft-sighing swain
Here rove without danger, and sigh without pain ;
The sweet bud of beauty, no blight shall here dread,
For hallow'd the turf is which pillow'd his head.*

*"Here youth shall be fam'd for their love and their
truth,
And cheerful old age feel the spirit of youth ;
For the raptures of fancy here poets shall tread,
For hallow'd the turf is which pillow'd his head.*

*"Flow on, silver Avon, in song ever flow,
Be the swans on thy bosom still whiter than snow,
Ever full be thy stream, like his fame may it spread,
And the turf ever hallow'd which pillow'd his
head."*

Garrick was neither the first nor the most

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tuneful singer to link the praise of Shakespeare with his native stream. There was Ben Jonson, for example, with his

*"Sweet swan of Avon ! What a sight it were
To see thee in our water yet appear,
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza, and our James."*

And Milton must not be forgotten, for if he ignored Shakespeare's river in his lofty lines he must surely have had the poet's spired church in mind when he asked :

*"What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured
bones
The labour of an age in piled stones ?
Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid ?"*

But in this anthology of Shakespeare and the Avon the mid-eighteenth century produced a poem which is less remembered than it deserves.

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Entitled "The Tomb of Shakespeare : a Vision," it was written in 1755 by John Gilbert Cooper, a minor poet who often achieved lines which would grace the most felicitous work of his major confrères. Obviously his poem owed much to the form and spirit of Gray's famous "Elegy," and some lines might be indicted on the score of close imitation, yet the conception is so original to the author and the execution so happy that the poet's indebtedness to his model may be condoned. As in a dream, then, Cooper imagined his soul emancipated from his body.

*"Through fields of air, methought, I took my flight,
Through every clime, o'er every region pass'd,
No paradise or ruin 'scaped my sight,
Hesperian garden, or Cimmerian waste.*

*"On Avon's banks I lit, whose streams appear
To wind with eddies fond round Shakespeare's
tomb,
The year's first feath'ry songsters warble near,
And v'lets breathe, and earliest roses bloom.*

THE CHURCH

“ *Here Fancy sat, (her dewy fingers cold
Decking with flow’rets fresh th’ unsullied
sod),
And bath’d with tears the sad sepulchral
mold,
Her fav’rite offspring’s long and last abode.*

“ *‘Ah ! what avails,’ she cry’d, ‘a Poet’s name ?
Ah ! what avails th’ immortalizing breath
To snatch from dumb Oblivion other’s fame ?
My darling child here lies a prey to Death !*

“ *Let gentle Otway, white-rob’d Pity’s priest,
From grief domestic teach the tears to flow,
Or Southern captivate th’ impassion’d breast
With heart-felt sighs and sympathy of woe.*

“ *For not to these his genius was confin’d,
Nature and I each tuneful pow’r had given,
Poetic transports of the maddening mind,
And the wing’d words that waft the soul to
heaven :*

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“ ‘ *The fiery glance of th’ intellectual eye,
Piercing all objects of creation’s store,
Which on this world’s extended surface lie ;
And plastic thought that still created more !* ’

“ ‘ *O grant,’ with eager rapture I reply’d,
‘ Grant me, great goddess of the changeful eye,
To view each Being in poetic pride,
To whom thy son gave immortality.’ ”*

Nor did the poet appeal in vain. At the bidding of Fancy and in answer to the waving of her “mystic rod,” first Ariel, and then Caliban, and anon the elfin sprites of Oberon’s realm and the witches of “Macbeth” and the ghosts of “Richard III” came from the unseen to do honour to the resting-place of their creator. And often in the years that have intervened that imaginary pageant has been repeated, for few can have visited Shakespeare’s grave unaccompanied by the great cloud of witnesses which owes its existence to his magic pen. Longfellow seems to have been an exception, for in his vision of the Avon one figure dominated the scene :

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*"Flow on, sweet river ! like his verse
Who lies beneath this sculptured hearse ;
Nor wait beside the churchyard wall
For him who cannot hear thy call.*

.

*"I see him by thy shallow edge
Wading knee-deep amid the sedge ;
And led in thought, as if thy stream
Were the swift river of a dream.*

*"He wonders whitherward it flows ;
And fain would follow where it goes,
To the wide world, that shall ere long
Be filled with his melodious song.*

*"Flow on, fair stream ! That dream is o'er ;
He stands upon another shore ;
A vaster river near him flows,
And still he follows where it goes."*

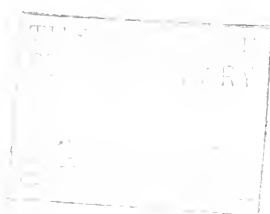
With a poetic licence which in that instance might easily have given rise to another bewildering legend, Garrick's flowing verse must have conveyed the impression that Shakespeare was

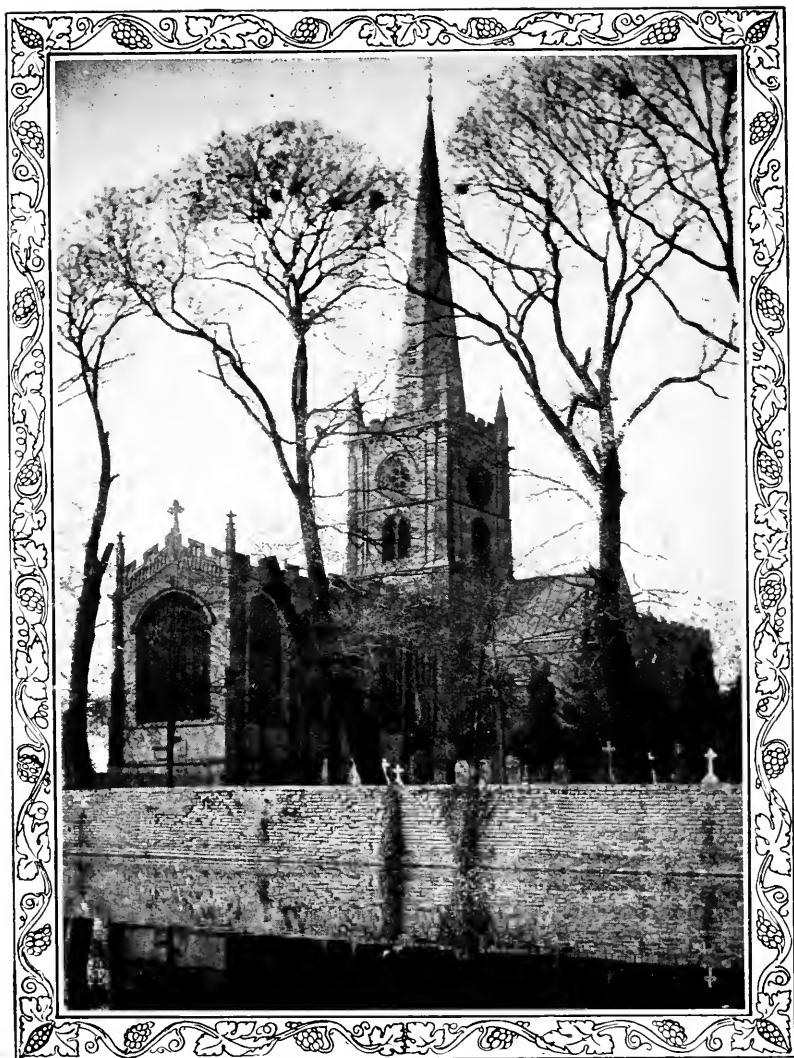
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buried in the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church. And succeeding poets have done not a little to foster that fiction, impelled thereto, no doubt, by the desire to make the adjacent Avon play a picturesque part in their lines.

Of course, the fact is that Shakespeare's grave is in the chancel of that church, and even Irving, much less Hawthorne, was well aware that such was the case. During the forty odd years, too, which separated the visits of the American pilgrims a notable change had taken place with regard to the relative importance of the Stratford shrines. At the time of Irving's pilgrimage the church was kept locked up, for does he not tell how he had to accompany the sexton Edmonds to his home to fetch the key? Hawthorne, on the contrary, found himself waylaid at the outer gate by "an old man in small-clothes" who, in anticipation of that sixpenny fee so dear to every Stratfordian, marched before him to the porch and rapped on the door. "I could have done it quite as effectually for myself," thought Hawthorne; "but it seems the old people of the neighbourhood haunt about the churchyard, in

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spite of the frowns and remonstrances of the sexton, who grudges them the half-eleemosynary sixpence which they sometimes get from visitors." By the middle of the last century, then, there was no waiting for the fetching of the key; the monetary value of Shakespeare's tomb had been realized and had even created an annoying type of middleman.

In describing the outward appearance of the church each of the American essayists used the word "venerable"; the same adjective would have been as appropriate from the pen of any writer who had attempted a word-picture of the building on that April day of 1616 when Shakespeare was laid to rest within its walls.

For even three hundred years ago Holy Trinity Church was already a venerable building. To date from William the Conqueror, with whom more founders of noble families "came over" to England than progenitors of American "good families" crossed to New England on the *Mayflower*, is often a dubious patent of antiquity; but in the case of Shakespeare's church there is no disputing the evidence of Domesday Book to

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the effect that in 1086 Stratford could boast of a church and a mill. Whether the present mill, which is close to the church, occupies the site of that mentioned in William's Survey is of no present importance; but it is of moment to recall that, in the opinion of conservative antiquaries, the existing church not only stands upon the site of the Domesday building, but actually includes portions of its walls. At the time of Shakespeare's burial, then, some parts of the sacred edifice had weathered the summers and winters of more than five centuries.

So many alterations have been made in the fabric in modern times that it would require the trained eye of an antiquarian architect to identify such stones as may still remain of the Domesday structure, but there are several parts of the church which are still their own evidence of respectable antiquity. There is the south aisle, for example, which dates from about the year 1332. Part of the building in which Shakespeare was buried belongs to the latter half of the fifteenth century, and had been completed in its present form nearly a hundred and

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fifty years before it received its most illustrious sleeper.

Many hues, then, of what Ruskin called the golden stair of time had touched the walls of Holy Trinity Church before that April day in 1616 which is the most memorable day in its annals. No record of the ceremony of Shakespeare's obsequies has survived. In the ancient parish register there is a brief and conventional entry setting forth the fact of his burial on April 25, 1616; but that is all. And yet how many pens were then busy in England, Ben Jonson's chief of all, which could have done justice to that solemn scene!

But that notable sepulture in Holy Trinity Church was to find a chronicler in modern days. Hence that sketch of "Shakespeare's Funeral" which Sir Edward Hamley outlined with such loving care and sympathy. It is an imaginary picture, of course, and far from flawless to the eye which is keen to detect anachronisms, but it is so suffused with the atmosphere of the seventeenth century that its violation of fact is condoned by its faithfulness of spirit.

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As representative, then, of the great world of London, Sir Edward introduces the persons of the poet Drayton and a son of Sir Walter Raleigh, making their visit to Stratford coincide with Shakespeare's burial day. They talk of the poet in the taproom of the Falcon Tavern, interview Kit Sly, meet Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, watch the funeral procession on its way to the grave, and mingle with the mourners inside the church. They listen, too, to the funeral sermon, which, with a bold flight of the imagination, Sir Edward credits to that Puritan preacher who had been a guest at New Place.

"So, friends," that austere divine is made to say of the dead poet, "having essayed to draw from the presence of death in our midst some matter for edification, I will speak a word of this particular brother who hath departed, dwelling, as is at these seasons the custom, chiefly on what may do him grace, and serve to sweeten his memory in the nostrils of those whom he hath left still in the bonds of the flesh. And first, of the fountain of his charities—it hath been known in Stratford for a perennial spring,

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abundant in refreshment to the poor, and in counsel and all good offices to those who needed continuance of another kind ; and if (as must be said were a man to speak truly) he ever regarded necessity more than deserving, and inquired not over closely into the way of life of those he relieved—nay, would oftentimes succour and comfort the godless no less than the godly, and bestow his bounty where it was like to be ill-spent—yet is that to be accounted better than the withholding altogether of alms, as some use. Next, of his excellent charity of another sort, I mean the brotherly relation he held with all conditions of men ; it hath been noted among you that he, who was used elsewhere to consort with the great, and hath been favoured even of princes, would yet converse with the lowly on a general level of goodwill, as if the only apparel he took thought of were the skin we are all born with ; for which, indeed, he had a great ensample. And, again, he hath ever gone among his fellows with a cheerful spirit, so that his presence hath been as wine among friends, and as oil among make-bates. And though I dare not say that he

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inclined of preference to the conversation of the godly, nor could be counted of the fellowship of saints, nor even a favourer of them, yet have I ever found him apt at serious converse, courteous in bearing, weighty in reply, and of unshakable serenity when I have adventured to press the truth on him somewhat instantly; inasmuch, that I, whose vocation 'tis to battle for the truth, have myself, ere now, been sore put to it to hold mine own, and found me in straits to oppose him, so nimble was his wit; though I doubt not that (the clear sight being with me) I should, with time for recollection, have had vouchsafed to me the wherewithal to give him sufficient answer. And it hath, at these times, seemed to me that he was a goodly vessel full of merchandise, yet driven by the wind apart from the port where alone her cargo could be bartered for that which is bread; and I have travailed over him with a sore travail; for I have hardly doubted that, with such gifts, he might, had it been so ordered, have justly aspired to be chief magistrate of your town, or even to serve you in parliament; or again, with diligent study and prayer, to become

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a preacher of weight, and have struck in the pulpit a good stroke for God's honour and the Devil's discomfiture. But, alas ! it is known to all of you, and I dare not dissemble it, that his calling hath been one that delighteth the carnal-minded, and profiteth the idle, and maketh the godly sad of heart ; while, as for his talent, it hath been put out to use where the only return is the praise which fleeteth as the bubble on the stream, and the repute which perisheth as the leaves of autumn ; for the making of rhymes and verses which flatter the ear, and the art of representing the vain shows of things, howe'er skilfully practised (and I profess not to have that acquaintance with the writings called plays, nor poems other than godly hymns, to judge his handiwork), cannot be held profitable for him that writes nor him that hears them. And therefore, whatsoe'er of wit and sense they may contain must be accounted as water poured out on the sand, which, better bestowed, might have solaced the thirsty, and nourished the herbs and the fruits, whereof many would have eaten and been strengthened. But though I may not

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altogether hold my peace on these matters, yet am I loath to dwell on them at this time ; rather would I point to the hope that our departed brother had, in the soberer life he of late led among you, put aside such toys as unworthy, and given us warrant to forget in him their author, and, moreover, to believe that, had he been spared unto us, he would have removed himself further, year by year, from such vanities and lightnesses of his youth, until, haply, by the example of a godly household, and the ministrations of faithful expounders of God's Word, he should have attained even to the perfect day."

Such was Shakespeare's funeral sermon as the posthumous reporter imagined it to have been, and it is highly probable that the sentences just quoted are an approximately faithful reflection of the sentiments which the poet's death inspired in the minds of many of his Stratford contemporaries. But Sir Edward Hamley did not content himself with representing the Puritan view of Shakespeare's career. On their walk back to New Place after the funeral young Raleigh and the

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poet Drayton fell into converse on the discourse to which they had just listened, and the former hotly exclaimed that he had great difficulty in refraining from answering the preacher even in church. "Here was a man," he declared, "who, having the vision of a mole, mistook Parnassus for a molehill, and went about to measure it with his ell-wand, and even thought to do men service by persuading them that the golden lights and purple shadows of the mountain, its fountains and dells, the forests that clothe it, the clouds that crown it, and the Muses that make it their haunt, are all vain illusions together."

But Drayton, with the more balanced vision of an older man, reminded his youthful companion that the perception of greatness was a slow growth. "And thus," he added, "will it be with the fame of Shakespeare, who had so much in common with the common men that they accounted him one of themselves, as Mercury passed among herdsmen for a herdsman, and Apollo among shepherds for a shepherd."

If some forgotten Puritan divine did actually debate the question of Shakespeare's religious

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faith over the open grave of the poet in Stratford Church nigh three hundred years ago, he merely anticipated that barren discussion which has cropped up so frequently in modern times. As Sir Walter Raleigh has remarked, so great is the power of the poet's name to stimulate unbridled curiosity that whole columns have been filled with the discussion of questions which, even if he were now alive, we could not answer. Such questions as, Was he a Christian? And, if so, a Roman Catholic or a Protestant? Or had he any religious faith at all? All we know is that he was baptized, and had his children baptized, according to the rites of the Church of England, and that his only son Hamnet and he himself were laid to rest with the burial service of that Church. Nothing can be inferred from the exordium of his will: "I comend my soule into the handes of God my Creator, hoping and assuredlie believing, through thonellie merittes of Jesus Christe my Saviour, to be made partaker of lyfe everlastinge"; for that was a stereotyped form which had no value as a personal confession of faith; and his most sympathetic biographer has affirmed that it

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cannot be claimed that he was "a deep student of the Bible." And as for his writings, they are distinguished for nothing so much as their "grand impersonality." For, as Lowell asked, what has he told us of himself? "If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind ; and if, as poets are wont to whine, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frostwork of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul."

Fifty years ago the poet's devotees were startled by the announcement that the burial-place and gravestone had been discovered of a man who was one of the pall-bearers at Shakespeare's funeral. This was, indeed, a momentous event ; it suggested that it might yet be possible to unearth new and important details of the poet's closing years. This seemed all the more probable because about the same time the writer of an article bearing the title of "Shakespeare : Was he a Christian?" declared that an old lady, a native of Stratford, who had been dead some fifty years, was wont to assert that her grandmother

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was present at the poet's funeral sermon, that the congregation was "very large and very serious," and that the preacher had concluded with the pious aspiration, "Would to God he had been a divine!"—much in the manner of the pulpit orator whose imaginary discourse has been cited above.

But to return to Shakespeare's pall-bearer. There had been found in the old burial-ground of Fredericksburg, Virginia—so ran the announcement of fifty years ago—an ancient slab of sandstone engraved with the thrilling inscription: "Here lies the body of Edward Helder, practitioner in physic and chirurgery. Born in Bedfordshire, England, in the year of our Lord 1542. Was contemporary with and one of the pall-bearers to the body of William Shakespeare. After a brief illness his spirit ascended in the year of our Lord 1618, aged 76." Nor was that the whole of the story. As proof that the stone had been a "feature" of the district for many years, appeal was made to the columns of the local newspaper, the *Fredericksburg Gazette*, for the year 1784, in which the following lines were printed:

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*“For in the churchyard at Fredericksburg
Juliet seemed to love,
Hamlet mused, and old Lear fell,
Beatrice laughed, and Ariel
Gleamed through the skies above—
As here, beneath this stone,
Lay in his narrow hall,
He who before had borne the pall
At mighty Shakespeare’s funeral.”*

For the moment, then, it looked as though the name of Edward Helder, M.D., had had greatness thrust upon it, and that henceforth it would have to be added to the select roll of Shakespeare’s friends. And yet no sooner had the Fredericksburg epitaph been announced to the world than cold scepticism began to scrutinize it with a critical eye. “I am suspicious of Americans,” said one antiquary, “even when their stories seem to elucidate the funeral of Shakespeare.” And he looked askance at the Fredericksburg epitaph because it was hardly probable that Dr. Helder should have gone to settle in America in his seventy-fourth year. Another disbeliever grounded

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his doubts on philology ; the phraseology of the epitaph was too modern to his taste, the word "contemporary," for example, being of later coinage. He was afraid, in short, that the inscription was an exercise of the inventive faculty by "some facetious antiquary of the 'Old Dominion.'"

And there the question remained for a decade, suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, between the realms of faith and incredulity. Some twelve years later Dr. Helder popped up again, only to be assaulted by another sceptic, who tried to lay his ghost by declaring him a figment of "Yankee imagination." At last, a quarter of a century after the good doctor from Bedfordshire had been dragged into publicity, an American, Moncure D. Conway, took a hand in settling the pretensions of the individual whom he characterized as Shakespeare's Jack-in-the-box. He went to the root of the matter by acquiring possession of the much-discussed doctor's gravestone, and found that the epitaph made no reference whatever to Shakespeare or his pall-bearer !

In its general aspect the interior of Stratford

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Church is practically unchanged since Washington Irving noted that its architecture and embellishments were superior to those of most country churches, that the place is "solemn and sepulchral," and that "tall elms wave before the pointed windows, and the Avon, which runs at a short distance from the walls, keeps up a low perpetual murmur." The gentle author of the "Sketch-Book" did not observe that there was anything remarkable about the position of the graves occupied by Shakespeare and his kindred; but the quick and observant eye of Hawthorne noted that "the poet and his family are in possession of what may be considered the very best burial-places that the church affords." Such is the case, for Shakespeare and his relatives lie in a row just within the altar-rails of the chancel.

There was a reason for that pre-eminence which the American pilgrims did not know. In 1605 Shakespeare purchased a thirty-one years' lease of the tithes of Stratford, and that transaction, in addition to making him one of the lay-rectors, gave him the right of interment in the chancel. It was not pride, then, but the automatic

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working of a legal custom which was responsible for the poet being buried in the most conspicuous part of the church. Thus it transpired that the friend who urged him to purchase the tithes was the unwitting cause of Shakespeare's grave occupying that super-eminence which would be its right in any temple of the illustrious dead.

There, then, just within the altar-rails, and one space removed from the north wall of the chancel, lies that simple slab of stone on which are incised the famous admonitory lines :

*“ Good frend for Jesus sake forbear,
To digg the dust enclosed heare :
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones,
And curst be he yt moves my bones.”*

Did Shakespeare write those jingling lines? Or were they already in use in his lifetime as a stock epitaph? As against the latter theory it should be remembered that no copy of the lines or even a colourable model from which they might have been derived has been discovered of a date prior to the year of the poet's death. A

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clerical simpleton who perpetrated a jejune pamphlet in support of the Baconian madness claimed that he had collected "evidence" to prove that Shakespeare's epitaph was a "crib" from an older inscription; but his sole "evidence" consists of a copy of the lines found on a gravestone which was more than eighty years older than the Stratford example!

Until late in the last century the earliest-known record dealing with the inscription on Shakespeare's grave was that contained in some notes of a visit paid to Stratford in 1777, the writer of which stated that "at the side of the chancel is a charnel-house filled with human bones, skulls, &c.—the guide said that Shakespeare was so much affected by this charnel-house that he wrote the epitaph for himself to prevent his bones being thrown into it." In 1884, however, there was discovered among the manuscripts of the Bodleian Library an old letter written in 1694 by an antiquary named William Hall, which gave a minute account of the traditions prevalent in Stratford in that year. "I very greedily embrace this occasion of acquainting you," so Hall wrote

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to a close friend, “with something which I found at Stratford-upon-Avon. That place I came unto on Thursday night, and the next day went to visit the ashes of the great Shakespeare which lye interr’d in that church. The verses which, in his lifetime, he ordered to be cut on his tombstone, for his monument has others, are these which follow :

*‘Reader, for Jesus’s sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here ;
Blessed be he that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.’*

“The little learning these verses contain would be a very strong argument of the want of it in the author, did not they carry something in them which stands in need of a comment. There is in this church a place which they call the bone-house, a repository of all bones they dig up, which are so many that they could load a great number of waggons. The Poet, being willing to preserve his bones unmoved, lays a curse upon him that moves them,

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and having to do with clerks and sextons, for the most part a very ignorant sort of people, he descends to the meanest of their capacity, and disrobes himself of that art which none of his contemporaries wore in greater perfection. Nor has the design mist of its effect, for, lest they should not only draw this curse upon themselves but also entail it upon their posterity, they have laid him full seventeen foot deep, deep enough to secure him."

In estimating the value of William Hall's tradition it must not be forgotten that he wrote seventy-eight years after Shakespeare's death ; but, on the other hand, it is well to bear in mind that such a period might have been within the recollection of some then living in the town. At the utmost it was a tradition removed from the poet's death by only two generations, and in a country town of the seventeenth century such evidence would have almost documentary value. Those sticklers for Shakespeare's fame who demand that everything for which his authorship is claimed shall always be pitched in the high poetic vein must make their account with Hall's

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ingenious argument that the poet deliberately wrote his epitaph to suit the mental capacity of the class he most desired to impress. Besides, other poets to whom high flights of genius have been easy have been known to descend to doggerel on occasion.

And in such a matter as this surely it is doing no violence to probability if the poet's verse is scanned in search of passages which may betray his personal feeling. That he possessed in an accentuated form the sentiment of repulsion excited by the fleshless relics of humanity is no outrageous inference from those passages in "Romeo and Juliet" and in "Hamlet" which describe the horrors of the charnel-house and the grave. Juliet's fear of the vault, "to whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in," and her vision of Tybalt's "festered in the shroud"; and Romeo's imprecation on the "detestable maw" and "womb of death"; and Hamlet's shuddering ejaculations as the gravediggers plied their gruesome occupation, his "Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats with 'em," and his "And smelt so? pah!" do

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suggest on Shakespeare's behalf an abhorrence of the sights of the charnel-house which may have created a consuming desire that his own bones should be allowed to rest in peace.

But whether Shakespeare did or did not pen that anathematizing stanza, its effect has been as miraculous as though it had been promulgated by a supernatural being. Washington Irving discerned "something extremely awful" in the lines, and Hawthorne placed on record a singularly striking example of their mysterious power. Save in one unimportant particular, they have hitherto preserved the poet's grave from violation. The exception refers to the sandstone slab which covers his resting-place; that which is now seen in the floor of the chancel is not the original stone, but a substitute which was made about a century ago to replace its outworn predecessor. The original slab has entirely disappeared.

For nearly three centuries, then, the ashes of Shakespeare have enjoyed quiet repose. The nearest approach to an excavation into the grave, wrote Halliwell-Phillipps, was made in the summer of 1796, in digging a vault in the

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immediate locality, when an opening appeared which was presumed to indicate the commencement of the site of the bard's remains. "The most scrupulous care, however, was taken not to disturb the neighbouring earth in the slightest degree, the clerk having been placed there until the brickwork of the adjoining vault was completed to prevent anyone making an examination. No relics whatever were visible through the small opening that thus presented itself, and as the poet was buried in the ground, not in a vault, the chancel earth, moreover, formerly absorbing a large degree of moisture, the great probability is that dust alone remains." This was the occasion of which Irving learned some particulars on his visit to Stratford. He talked with the old sexton who kept watch for a couple of days over the aperture, and learned how that vigilant sentinel had seen "nothing but dust." As the essayist concluded, it was something to have seen the dust of Shakespeare.

But there have not been lacking many who would fain see more than that; as no age has wanted those callous spirits who would "peep

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and botanize " on a mother's grave, so for several generations past there have been many victims to a ruthless curiosity which has made them anxious to explore the poet's tomb. Sombre German savants have wanted to finger his skull to ascertain whether his brain-capacity was in accurate ratio with the legacy of his genius; exponents of the Baconian lunacy have wished to rifle his coffin for proofs of their moonshine theory; phrenologists have itched to compare their chart of the bumps on the bust; students of portraiture have pined for data which might enable them to settle the vexed problem of the poet's true likeness.

To keep at bay such a horde of cranks has been no light task for the guardians of Shakespeare's grave. Sometimes they have made their assaults as individuals, as when Delia Bacon tried her feminine wiles on one rector, and a spectacled German professor exhorted another in the sacred name of knowledge; on other occasions they have joined forces and presented argumentative petitions to the corporation. But up to the present every effort to violate the poet's tomb has failed.

Dark hints have been given from time to time

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that the general public has been kept ignorant of many of the attempts made on the grave. In recent years, so the whisper goes, no fewer than five such efforts have been frustrated, and it is even asserted that there is a secret society which exists for the sole purpose of guarding the poet's tomb, the membership of which is open to Americans, but strictly barred against Germans. The birthplace is certainly equipped with all kinds of mysterious burglar alarms, and perhaps the secret society—unless that organization has no more corporate existence than in the imagination of a journalist gravelled for "copy"—has taken the same precaution with the grave. It may do good to foster such a legend: if prospective marauders can be convinced that the chancel of Stratford Church bristles with man-traps and spring-guns they will be the more likely to give it a wide berth.

Unless Hawthorne greatly overstated the facts of the case, it would seem that Shakespeare's grave was never in more imminent danger of violation than when Delia Bacon argued herself into the conviction that the key to the philosophy she

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read into the poet's works was buried in his grave. She had discovered—so she declared to the author of "Our Old Home"—in the letters of Lord Bacon definite and minute instructions how to find a number of important documents which were hidden in a hollow space under the surface of Shakespeare's gravestone, and she set herself the task of securing possession of those papers. Taking a humble lodging in Stratford, then, she began to haunt the church, and eventually seemed to have enlisted the sympathy of the clerk and rector. But just as she imagined she had secured the consent of the rector to the opening of the grave a doubt arose in her mind that she might have made a mistake as to the depository in which the documents were concealed.

Nevertheless, as Hawthorne wrote, Miss Bacon "continued to hover around the church, and seems to have had full freedom of entrance in the daytime, and special licence, on one occasion at least, at a late hour of the night. She went thither with a dark-lantern, which could but twinkle like a glow-worm through the volume of obscurity that filled the great dusky edifice.

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Groping her way up the aisle and towards the chancel, she sat down on the elevated part of the pavement above Shakespeare's grave. If the divine poet really wrote the inscription there, and cared as much about the quiet of his bones as its deprecatory earnestness would imply, it was time for those crumbling relics to bestir themselves under her sacrilegious feet. But they were safe. She made no attempt to disturb them; though, I believe, she looked narrowly into the crevices between Shakespeare's and the two adjacent stones, and in some way satisfied herself that her single strength would suffice to lift the former in case of need. She threw the feeble ray of her lantern up towards the bust, but could not make it visible beneath the darkness of the vaulted roof. Had she been subject to superstitious terrors, it is impossible to conceive of a situation that could better entitle her to feel them, for, if Shakespeare's ghost would rise at any provocation, it must have shown itself then; but it is my sincere belief that, if his figure had appeared within the scope of her dark-lantern, in his slashed doublet and gown, and with his eyes

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bent on her beneath the high, bald forehead, just as we see him in the bust, she would have met him fearlessly and controverted his claims to the authorship of the plays to his very face. She had taught herself to contemn 'Lord Leicester's groom' (it was one of her disdainful epithets for the world's incomparable poet) so thoroughly that even his disembodied spirit would hardly have found civil treatment at Miss Bacon's hands. Her vigil, though it appears to have had no definite object, continued far into the night. Several times she heard a low movement in the aisles : a stealthy, dubious footfall prowling about in the darkness, now here, now there, among the pillars and ancient tombs, as if some restless inhabitant of the latter had crept forth to peep at the intruder. By and by the clerk made his appearance, and confessed that he had been watching her ever since she entered the church."

But some guardian or other has been watching through all the ensuing years. Delia Bacon's experience should be a warning to other tomb-troublers; where she failed no one is likely to succeed. The anathematizing stanza protected

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the poet's ashes through the ages of superstition ; reverence for genius may be relied upon to secure their repose through all succeeding generations.

Fortunate would it have been had some similar talisman kept guard over that bust of the poet which adorns the wall above his grave. When that monument, with its columns of black marble and its naked cupids, was erected, is not known ; all that is certain is that it was completed prior to 1623, and hence within seven years of Shakespeare's death. It bears two inscriptions, one in Latin, which has been rendered thus :

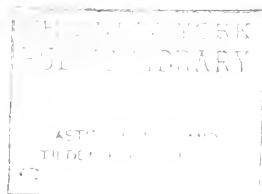
*"In wisdom a Nestor, in genius a Socrates, in art a
Virgil ;
The earth shrouds him, the nation mourns him,
Olympus guards him" ;*

the other in English :

*"Stay, passenger, why goest thou by so fast ?
Read, if thou canst, whom envious death hath plast
Within this monument ; Shakespeare with whome
Quick nature dide ; whose name doth deck ys tombe
Far more than cost ; sith all yt he hath writt
Leaves living art but page to serve his witt."*



THE AVON AT STRATFORD



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And then follow the mortuary details: "Obit. ano. doi 1616. Ætatis 53. Die. 23 Ap."

Interesting as the epitaph is for its eulogistic references to the genius of the poet, the supreme value of the memorial consists in the portrait bust.

Is it a faithful likeness? Those who contend that it is argue that the monument was undoubtedly erected by Shakespeare's family, that his widow and daughters would entertain a laudable anxiety to have his actual features preserved for posterity, and that as the sculptor, Gerard Johnson, lived in Southwark in the neighbourhood of the Globe Theatre, he might have known the poet personally, or at the least was acquainted with some who were familiar with his appearance. Besides, the sculptor Chantrey gave it as his confirmed opinion that the bust was taken from a cast after death.

On the other hand, there was current in the first quarter of the last century a tradition to the effect that the bust was not founded on any portrait or death-mask, but was modelled from a Stratford blacksmith who bore a remarkable

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resemblance to the bard. That tradition, indeed, was in existence in the middle of the eighteenth century, for a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1759 declared that no genuine portrait of Shakespeare had ever existed, and that that which passed for his was "taken long after his death from a person extremely like him."

Unfortunately the problem is complicated by the existence of other portraits. There is the engraved half-length, for example, by Martin Droeshout, which formed the frontispiece of the First Folio published in 1623, and other claimants for consideration include the painting from which Droeshout is supposed to have worked, and the Ely House and Chandos portraits. Most of the best authorities now agree that the Droeshout painting—which hangs in the Memorial picture gallery at Stratford—was probably painted from life in Shakespeare's forty-fifth year, and it remains for those who are not authorities to accept that decision in spite of the discrepancies between the canvas and the bust.

Even the bust has been the occasion of startling differences of opinion. Washington Irving

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described its aspect as "pleasant and serene, with a finely arched forehead," and added : "I thought I could read in it clear indications of that cheerful, social disposition by which he was as much characterized among his contemporaries as by the vastness of his genius"; but Hawthorne, more critical than his easy-going compatriot, declared that the sight of it compelled him to "take down the beautiful, lofty-browed, and noble picture" of the poet which had hitherto hung in his mental portrait gallery.

But Hawthorne qualified his criticism. If he felt that the bust could not be said to represent a beautiful face or a noble head, he admitted that it lays firm hold of one's sense of reality and insists upon acceptance as the picture, if not of the poet, yet as the wealthy burgher and the convivial friend of John a' Combe. "I know not what the phrenologists say to the bust," he added. "The forehead is but moderately developed, and retreats somewhat, the upper part of the skull rising pyramidally; the eyes are prominent almost beyond the penthouse of the brow; the upper lip is so long that it must have

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been almost a deformity, unless the sculptor artistically exaggerated its length, in consideration that, on the pedestal, it must be foreshortened by being looked at from below. On the whole, Shakespeare must have had a singular rather than a prepossessing face ; and it is wonderful how, with this bust before its eyes, the world has persisted in maintaining an erroneous notion of his appearance, allowing painters and sculptors to foist their idealized nonsense on us all, instead of the genuine man. For my part, the Shakespeare of my mind's eye is henceforth to be a personage of a ruddy English complexion, with a reasonably capacious brow, intelligent and quickly observant eyes, a nose curved slightly outward, a long queer upper lip, with the mouth a little unclosed beneath it, and cheeks considerably developed in the lower part and beneath the chin." In fine, the American writer shared the opinion of the English artist Gainsborough, though he expressed it more politely. When Gainsborough accepted a commission to paint a portrait of Shakespeare he refused to be bound by the Stratford monument or the Droeshout engraving. "Damn the

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original picture," he exclaimed. "I think a stupider face I never beheld."

One fact may be urged in extenuation of the Stratford bust: none of its modern critics saw it in its original state. Not being protected by such a talisman as that which preserved the grave from violation, it, in 1793, was subjected to a process of "restoration" which no efforts to revive its pristine appearance have quite obliterated. The arch-perpetrator of that sacrilege was Edmund Malone, the Shakespearean commentator, who may be allowed to tell the story in his own complacent way. "I ought not to forget to tell you," he wrote a friend concerning his doings on a visit to Stratford, "that I did a public service while I was there. His bust, you know, about forty years ago was painted all over with various colours by some players, under the notion of beautifying it. With Dr. Davenport's permission I brought it back to its original state by painting it a good stone colour, and then, having first erected a small scaffold, we drew him carefully from his niche and took a very good mould from his face."

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Malone was mistaken as to the "original state" of the bust; there can be no question that, as was the custom in the seventeenth century, the bust was from the first coloured in imitation of life; and when the "good stone colour" was removed in 1861 an effort was made to reproduce the hazel of the eyes, the auburn of the hair and beard, the scarlet of the doublet, and the crimson and green of the cushion. So Malone's "public service" was undone, and he now lives in the annals of Stratford Church in the satire of the pilgrim who inscribed these lines in the visitors' book:

*"Stranger to whom this monument is shown,
Invoke the Poet's curse upon Malone;
Whose meddling zeal his barbarous taste betrays
And smears his tombstone as he marr'd his plays."*

So overwhelming is the fame of Shakespeare that, as Hawthorne remarked, it suffers nothing else to be recognized within its presence unless illuminated by some side-ray from itself. It is

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true that Stratford Church can boast many stately monuments and curious epitaphs, such as would make the renown of any other temple which did not harbour so illustrious a guest as the poet; but to the majority of visitors the only other memorials of the dead which arrest attention are those which cover the dust of the Shakespeare kindred.

And, as has been noted above, they all lie in a row on either side of the immortal poet. To the left of his own grave is that of his wife, the Anne Hathaway of many a romantic legend, who survived him more than seven years, and was at length laid to rest under an epitaph which gave eloquent expression to her children's affection. On the right of Shakespeare's tomb was interred the Thomas Nash who was the first husband of the poet's granddaughter and his last lineal descendant, while next in order come the graves of the poet's son-in-law, Dr. Hall, and his elder daughter, Susannah. While the epitaphs on Anne Shakespeare and Thomas Nash and Dr. Hall were couched in Latin, that on Susannah Hall told its story in English :

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*"Witty above her sex, but that's not all,
Wise to salvation was Mistress Hall,
Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this
Wholly of him with whom she's now in bliss."*

Which was a happy tribute to hereditary genius and acquired piety, doing justice alike to the Shakespeare strain and the Puritanism of Susannah's husband.

Such are the poet's companions in death, men and women of his own household, and so not likely to be troubled with that "delicate individuality" which, it has been suggested, might impel more sensitive mediocrities to rise up at midnight and grope their way out of the church-door. And for him and them alike there is the one melodious farewell :

*"Fear no more the heat o' the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages ;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages."*

CHAPTER IV : THE TOWN

SUCH a wealth of adulatory adjectives has been heaped upon Stratford-on-Avon solely because it was the home of Shakespeare that the truth is hard to come by. The moral of Henry James's inimitable short story "The Birthplace" has a wider application than to the two tenements in Henley Street. When the meditative scholar and his wife assumed their duties as custodians of that famous shrine they resolved, it will be remembered, to abandon the picturesque legends of their ignorant predecessors and restrict themselves to such facts as were supported by reliable evidence. Of course the result was disastrous. Visitors became fewer and fewer; the annual income dwindled; the trustees began to complain; and at length the truthful pair realized that a continuance in well-doing must end in their dismissal. At that juncture they decided to revert to the fanciful stories of their predecessors. The new policy had a marvellous effect. In a flash the old popularity of

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the birthplace was restored ; the stream of visitors increased in volume every month ; the revenue rose to heights it had never touched ; and the trustees and everybody in the town rejoiced.

While working such a suggestive vein it is a pity Mr. James did not follow it into other seams. He might have included the whole of the town in his scheme of gentle satire. And in so doing he could have pleaded the illustrious examples of Horace Walpole and David Garrick. The opinions of those frank topographers have already been recorded, the former having been quoted as describing Stratford as the "wretchedest old town" he had seen, and the latter as giving it the palm as "the most dirty, unseemly, ill-pav'd, wretched-looking town in all Britain."

But a truthful chronicler should hasten to add that the indictments of Walpole and Garrick are no longer true. For if the Stratford of the eighteenth century was different from the Stratford of the sixteenth century on the score of picturesqueness, the Stratford of the twentieth century has no sanitary likeness to the Stratford of Walpole and Garrick.

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There is, however, no denying the impeachment that Stratford is a singularly sophisticated town. The commercialism of the "shrine" business is carried to excess. The annual Shakespeare festival is an example. It lasts for three solid weeks; twenty-one days to celebrate a birthday which is only a tradition! But the shopkeepers exploit tradition for three hundred and sixty-five days a year. They have set their hearts on sixpences and dollars. In the shadow of the old Clopton Bridge there is a steam-launch flaunting the legend "*The George Washington*—Welcome to the Avon," and that seductive greeting is duplicated all over the town. The picture-postal merchant lures with the "King John" quotation, "Have I not here the best cards?" there are "Shakespearean Depôts" beyond count; there is an "As You Like It" tea-house; to catch the heretics one street boasts its "Bacon's Shakespeare Restaurant"; dealers in "antiques" unblushingly season "old" chairs and chests over their shop-fronts in full view of the unsuspecting tourist; and if the mulberry-tree relics are gone, the supply is inexhaustible of

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souvenirs made from wood taken from Shakespeare's church with a "certificate" thrown in. Even the church used to be tainted with that commercial spirit. Before the advent of the present vicar the porch and space just inside the door was a veritable mart for the sale of postals, guide-books, photographs, &c., and at every turn one saw mercenary placards announcing that the fee for this was so much and for that and the other so much more. Happily those money-changers' tables have been overturned.

Many "records" in "doing" the sights of Stratford have been established. They have, of course, been placed to the credit of "hustling" Americans. Instances are cited of couples seeing Europe for a wager who have startled the attendant of the church by the unseemly haste of their progress up the nave to the tomb and back to the door, while it is no uncommon thing for pilgrims to include between trains a dash for the birthplace, New Place, and the grave.

There are certain parts of Stratford which are unworthy of even such lightning sight-seeing. Not that they are dirty, or ill-paved, or wretched-

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looking, but that they are blighted by the meanness of Victorian domestic house-building. Most of the streets still bear the names by which Shakespeare knew them, but the dramatist would be greatly exercised to recognize them in any other way. Even the "Old Town" district, save for a house or two, belies its name. There most do flourish those hard-lined red-brick villas which so-called architects were so fond of designing in the last century—abominations of brick and slate which are nowhere so offensive as in a town which can show superb examples of Elizabethan domestic architecture. Unless actual experiment had proved the fact beyond dispute, no one would imagine that lovely half-timber work is hidden behind the hideous modern brick fronts of many a house in the business thoroughfares of the town. Had those picturesque object-lessons been in evidence in the last century, however, it is more than probable that their lessons would have been wasted upon house designers so indifferent to beauty as those jerry-builders who are responsible for so much of the monotony of Stratford streets.

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

And yet, for those who will seek and spare time for the search, there are not a few buildings still surviving which provide suggestive food for the historic imagination. It is possible, indeed, to piece together a picture which will revive the aspect of the town as it was seen by Shakespeare's eyes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Two of the venerable landmarks which link our own days with the far-off ages owe their existence to that Sir Hugh Clopton who built the "praty house of bricks and tymbre" which as New Place became the abode of Shakespeare in his last years. A younger son of the Clopton family, whose manor-house is distant about a mile from the town, Sir Hugh Clopton had to carve out his own fortune. And he made a great success of the task. Realizing that there was little scope for his ambition in the quiet town by the Avon, he made his way to the capital and set up business as a mercer. It was the London of the fifteenth century in which his lot was cast, when English commerce was at the beginning of that development which in the next century made

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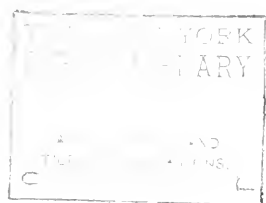
it a formidable rival in the markets of the world, and Hugh Clopton appears to have been a notable example of that combination of trader and aristocrat which was not infrequent in those days. He prospered apace; he gave no hostages to fortune by taking to himself a wife; he won the favour of his fellow-citizens so thoroughly that he became successively alderman, sheriff, and mayor; and his great wealth enabled him to emulate the example of those fifteenth-century burghers who lavished so much of their gold on works of public benefit.

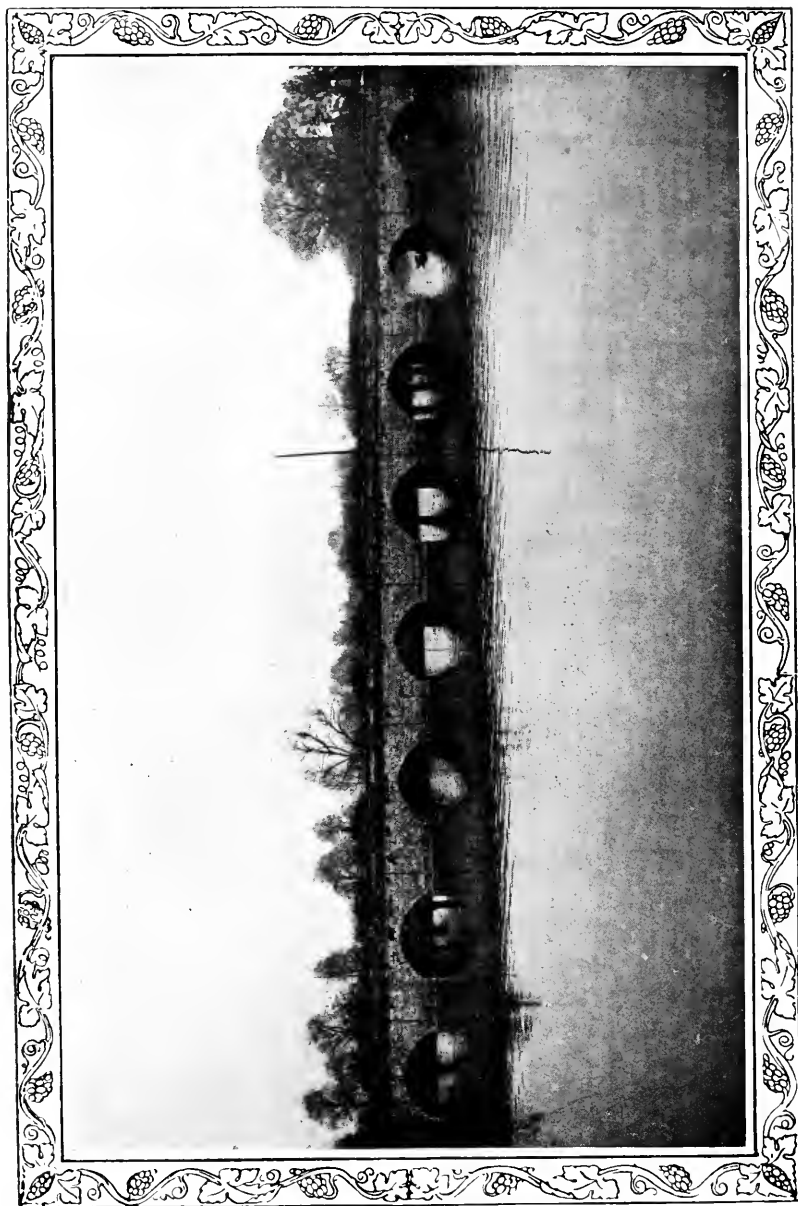
In days when schools and bridges, highways and hospitals, lighting and sanitation are supported by rate charges which fall on the community as a whole, we are apt to forget those generous benefactors who in less orderly ages supplied the lack of state or municipal aid by liberal donations from their private fortunes. Among such benefactors Sir Hugh Clopton deserves to be held in grateful recollection. He was not unmindful of the needs of poor scholars at Oxford and Cambridge, nor did he overlook the claims of the city in which he amassed his

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wealth; but he naturally reserved his greatest gifts for the town of his nativity.

If, then, there is no monument to his memory in Holy Trinity Church—though a high tomb in that building is thought to have been intended for his resting-place—he has in the old bridge over the Avon a memorial which will preserve his name for many generations. The river here, where the London road enters the town, is abnormally wide, and according to the testimony of Leland, who visited the town about 1543, it was originally spanned by a “poore bridge of tymber” which had no safe approach, so that “many poore folkes refused to come to Stratford when the Avon was up, or comminge thither, stood in jeopardye of lyfe.” There were many other communities in England as badly off for safe bridges. In the Devonshire town of Barnstaple, for example, it was customary to issue special licences to officials to authorize them to travel hither and thither collecting subscriptions for the repair and maintenance of the Long Bridge over the “great hugy-mighty perylous and dreadful water named Taw.” Those licences





THE CLOPTON BRIDGE

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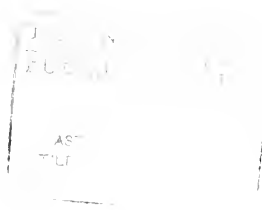
appealed to the generous to "departe with some portions" of their goods to keep that bridge in order, promising the donors that they would have "gret mede of Almighty God for your so doinge and of vs hartie thanks." They were also promised remembrance in an annual dirge and mass as further reward.

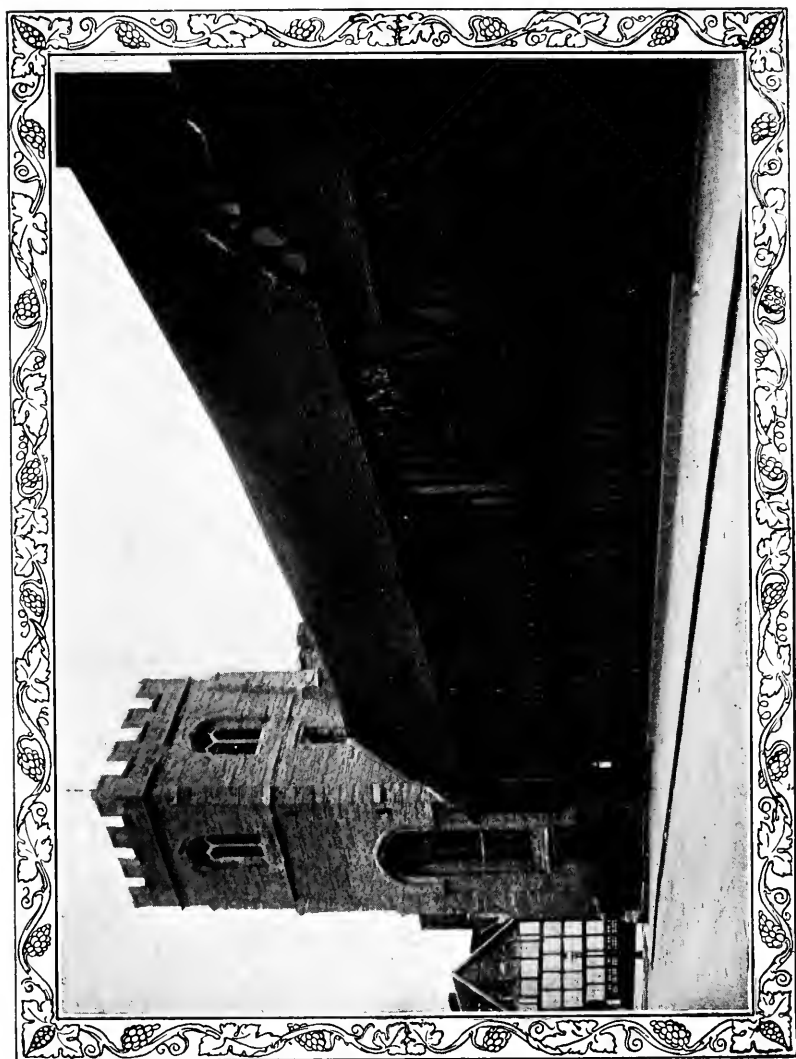
Perhaps the element of religion played some part in Sir Hugh Clopton's resolve to equip his native town with a noble and substantial bridge. But whatever his motive he spared no expense in carrying out his self-imposed task. Some time, then, in the closing quarter of the fifteenth century he enlisted the services of architect and builder and bade them rear such a bridge over the Avon and connect it with such causeways as would ensure a safe passage over the river for all comers. And this, in its most substantial parts, is the bridge of fourteen large arches which is still mirrored in the placid surface of Shakespeare's stream. It has been widened in more modern times, it is true, but so much of the old structure still remains that it is justly called the Clopton Bridge.

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Like the "auld brig" of Ayr, it will long outlast that nineteenth-century rival of brick which so ineffectually challenges comparison between the methods of the old builders and the new.

But there is another son of Stratford who has claims upon remembrance in connexion with the bridge over the Avon. This is that John de Stratford who eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. He came of a capable family, for a brother, Robert, was Chancellor of England and then Bishop of Chichester, and his nephew Ralph ended his days as Bishop of London. John de Stratford was at one time parson of his native town, and when he attained high position and wealth he greatly embellished the church of his early ministry. Nor did he forget more secular matters. Thus in his will, dated 1348, various sums of money were left for the repair of the bridge at Stratford, which must, of course, have been that "poore bridge of tymber" mentioned by Leland. Whether that benefaction ever took effect is, however, open to question. For when John de Stratford died his goods were valued at a sum which, when his debts and funeral expenses





GRAMMAR SCHOOL AND GUILD CHAPEL

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were paid, must have left his executors out of pocket.

By a little effort of the imagination it is possible to denude the Clopton Bridge of its modern accretions and see it in the mind's eye as it was when Shakespeare crossed it on his journeys to and from London. Even less mental reconstruction is required in the case of another building upon which the poet's eyes often rested. Apart from the probable connexion of the structure with his school-days, the fact that the windows of New Place looked out upon the grey tower of the Guild Chapel on the opposite corner of Chapel Lane is sufficient evidence that it was a constant object of his vision. And that tower was another of Sir Hugh Clopton's benefactions. He seems to have died before the work was completed, but in his will he left minute instructions for the carrying on of the work, stipulating that the masons should "sufficiently and ably do and finish the same with good and true workmanship," and providing that his executors should pay the charges out of his estate.

Of course, Sir Hugh Clopton was the rebuilder,

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not the builder, of the Guild Chapel nave and tower. That sacred edifice had a long history behind it when it attracted the re-edifying zeal of Stratford's wealthy mercer son. Indeed, apart from Holy Trinity Church, there is no building in Stratford which has so venerable a history as that group of masonry which marks the southern corner of Chapel Lane.

As the house of worship used by the members of the fraternity or Guild of the Holy Cross, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John the Baptist it is inseparably associated with the records of that interesting brotherhood. When that organization was first founded is not known; why it was founded has been made clear in recent years, though the discovery of the document making that fact obvious seems to have been ignored by most writers on the town. Thus the inquirer is informed that the fraternity was established for the "encouragement of friendliness and brotherly love," and also that William Sude is "the name of the author of the earliest extant deed of gift." Most of the books on Stratford are prolific in other statements equally inaccurate.

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According to the testimony of the earliest extant document, dated in October 1270, the guild was founded for the support of such poor priests as had been ordained by the Bishop of Worcester, but who held no benefits; to provide for the necessities of "other indigent persons" was a secondary matter. And while it is true that William Sude was a benefactor to the extent of endowing the fraternity with a yearly rent of the munificent sum of sixpence, his deed is but one of many made during the reign of Henry III, none of which bear any specific date. There was William Bride, for example, who also left an annual rent of sixpence, and a widow named Juliana de Dumbeltone, whose generosity extended to thirteenpence a year, either of whom may have antedated William Sude.

Although now known by the threefold name of the Guild of the Holy Cross, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John the Baptist, in its earliest days the fraternity was called simply the Guild of the Holy Cross. It has been inferred that its later designation was the outcome of an incorporation of two other kindred organizations,

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

but on that matter no evidence is yet available. When Godfrey Gifford, Bishop of Worcester, in 1270 granted forty days' indulgence to all sincere penitents who had confessed their sins and conferred benefits on the fraternity, it was described merely as the Guild of the Holy Cross, and that name continued to be used in the deeds of gift made during many subsequent years.

Notwithstanding the specific object for which the guild was founded, it seems probable that its sphere of usefulness was soon enlarged. At any rate, by the end of the fourteenth century it had become much more than a charitable society for the exclusive benefit of priests without charges. In 1388 the Parliament called upon the masters and wardens of all guilds to furnish full particulars concerning the foundation, constitution, and property of their several societies, and among the returns which still exist is a curious document describing the ordinances of Stratford's Guild of the Holy Cross. From this it appears that for males the annual fee for membership was fourpence, payable a penny at a time at the four feasts of the year, and that the sisters' contri-

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butions were limited to twopence and a great tankard of ale. The brethren, too, were expected to provide an additional twopence on the occasion of the Easter feast as well as a tankard of ale comparable to that donated by the weaker sex.

That Easter feast was in the closing years of the fourteenth century the chief festival of the guild. It was to be conducted in such a manner that "brotherly love shall be cherished among them and evil-speaking driven out; that peace shall always dwell among them, and true love be upheld." The great tankards of ale were to be given to the poor, but not before all the brethren and sisters had met for prayer in their common hall.

At the Easter feast, too, as well as at the other three festivals of each year, a wax candle was to be kept alight "before the blessed Cross" in the chapel of the guild. Such pious services, however, did not exhaust the duties of the members. "It is ordained," so ran the rules of the society, "by the brethren and sisters of the guild, that, when any of them dies, the wax candle before-

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

named, together with eight smaller ones, shall be carried from the church to the house of him that is dead ; and there they shall be kept alight before the body of the dead until it is carried to the church ; and the wax candles shall be carried and kept alight until the body is buried, and afterwards shall be set before the Cross. Also, all the brethren of the guild are bound to follow the body to the church, and pray for his soul until the body is buried. And whoever does not fulfil this shall pay one halfpenny. It is also ordained by the brethren and sisters that if any poor man in the town dies, or if any stranger has not means of his own out of which to pay for a light to be kept burning before his body, the brethren and sisters shall, for their souls' health, find four wax candles, and one sheet, and a hearse-cloth to lay over the coffin until the body is buried." Nor was that all. On the death of a brother a third part of the brethren were required to watch over his body through each night ere it was borne to the church. And further, when any of the fraternity fell into poverty or was robbed, "then, so long as he

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bears himself well and rightly towards the brethren and sisters of the guild, they shall find him in food and clothing and what else he needs." Such were the duties and privileges of guild members in the closing years of the fourteenth century.

Like many another organization, then, the Stratford guild played an important part in the religious and social life of the town until it was suppressed with the monasteries in 1547. Ere that evil day dawned, however, the brethren had undertaken services for the community which in a modified form are still being rendered. In addition to becoming the chief ruling body of the town, the guild in the fifteenth century established a grammar school for the children of members, and had provided an old-age haven for a dozen poor men and as many poor women. They also bore their share in the upkeep of the bridge over the Avon. Such good works were, no doubt, counted unto Stratford for righteousness when some of the members of the guild petitioned Edward VI to undo the work of his father.

Nor was the appeal made in vain. For in 1553

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the boy king granted a new charter to the town by the Avon the terms of which were as follow (the document deserves careful reading for the tribute it bears to the work of the Guild of the Holy Cross): "Whereas the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon in the county of Warwick, is an ancient borough, in which borough a certain Guild was in former time founded and endowed with divers lands tenements and possessions, from whose rents revenues and profits a certain Grammar School was maintained and supported for the education and instruction of boys and youths, and a certain charitable house was there maintained and supported for the sustenance of twenty-four poor persons, and a certain great stone bridge called Stratford Bridge placed and built over the water and river of the Avon beside the said borough was from time to time maintained and repaired, and the lands tenements and possessions of the same Guild have come into our hand and now remain in our hands; And whereas the inhabitants of the borough of Stratford aforesaid from time beyond the memory of man have had and enjoyed divers franchises liberties and free

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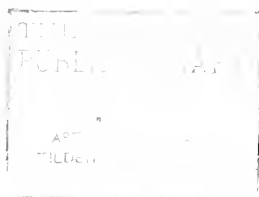
customs jurisdictions privileges reversions and quittances by reason and pretext of charters concessions and confirmations made in ancient time by our progenitors to the Master and Brethren of the aforesaid Guild and otherwise, which the same inhabitants of the same borough aforesaid are now very little able to have and enjoy, because the aforesaid Guild is dissolved, and in consideration of other causes now apparent to us whence it appears likely that the borough aforesaid and the government thereof may go to a worse state from time to time, if a remedy be not quickly provided." For that reason, then, the king granted the town a new charter, one effect of which was to restore the grammar school to its beneficent mission, and another to equip the town with a municipal form of government.

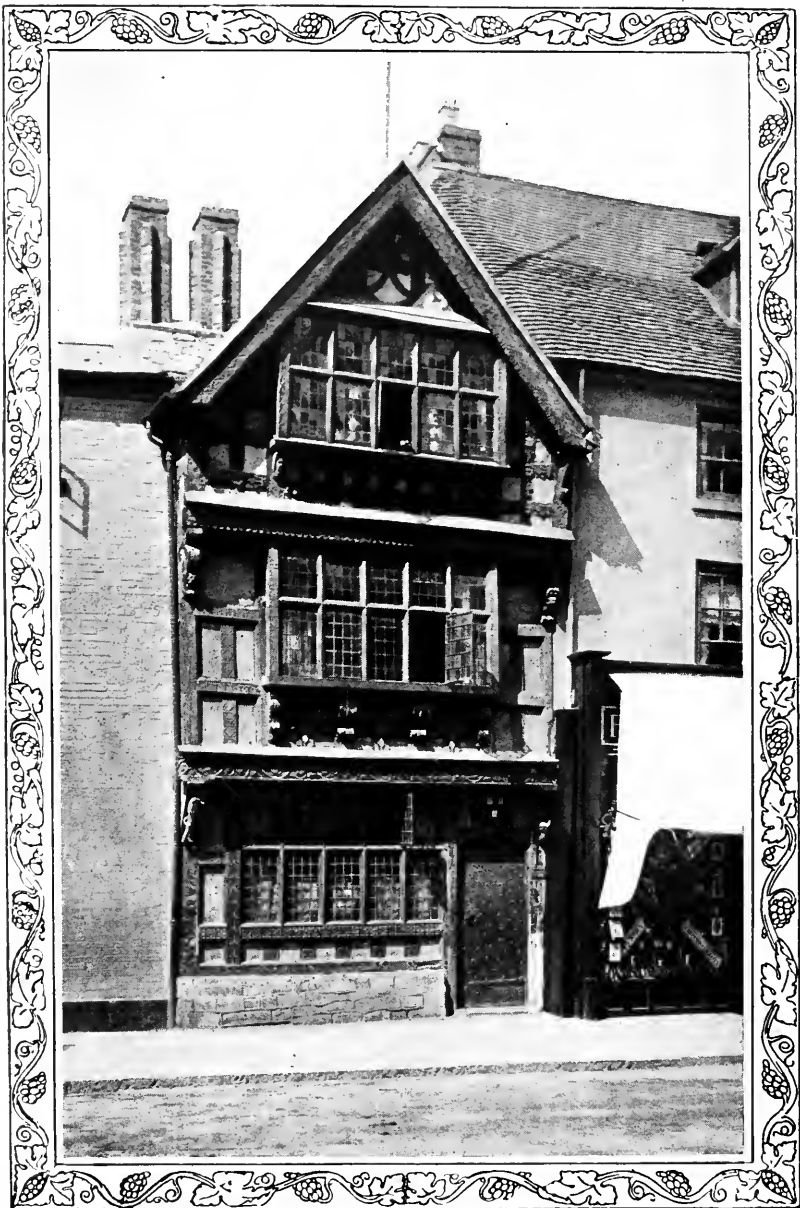
That royal grant came in the nick of time. The new form of government enabled John Shakespeare to attain distinction among his fellow-townsmen by holding various offices in the corporation; the restitution of the grammar school provided an instrument for the education of Stratford's most famous son.

SHAKESPEARE AND STRATFORD

Hence the pilgrim to Stratford will not only visit the Guild Chapel as the still-surviving memorial of a friendly society whose picturesque history is of absorbing interest, but will pass into the ancient grammar school and con its panelled walls with the arrested attention which is due to the building where Shakespeare learnt his "small Latin and less Greek." It is true there is no incontestable evidence that this was the scene of the poet's school-days, but the presumption that it was is almost as strong as actual proof. To this school, as Sir Sidney Lee has remarked, the children of the Stratford freemen were sent, with rare exceptions. It was a type of those common schools where all sorts of children were taught in the sixteenth century, and it must be accepted as Shakespeare's place of education until proof to the contrary is forthcoming. Altogether, then, this corner of the town, with its ancient chapel and guild-hall and grammar school and picturesque almshouses, should aid the pilgrim not a little in his effort to repicture the Stratford of the past.

And within a stone's-throw, on the west side





HARVARD HOUSE

THE TOWN

of the High Street, there is another ancient building which is the most notable survival of the domestic architecture of Shakespeare's own days. This is the Harvard House, which is now the property of the Harvard University. Now the date on that house, 1596, coincides with an important year in the life of Shakespeare, for it was in 1596 he lost his only son, and we may be certain that he did not fail to visit his native town on that sad occasion. The house on the High Street was built by Thomas Rogers, a prosperous tradesman of the town who, like John Shakespeare, had held office in connexion with the corporation, and that he made it a conspicuous example of contemporary domestic architecture may be inferred from the fact that it is even to-day prominent among the show-places of Stratford. Rich as the town is in ancient buildings, there is no structure of its type which can display such a wealth of curious detailed carving or present such an attractive picture as a whole. From what is known of the houses of Stratford in the sixteenth century it is safe to conclude that this new home of the Rogers family must

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have been the talk of the town in the year of its completion, and there can be little risk in hazarding the guess that Shakespeare himself took an early opportunity of wandering through its rooms.

But the Harvard House has been a sad stumbling-stone to many Stratford chroniclers. One, for example, commits himself to the assertion that Thomas Rogers's daughter Catherine "married John Harvard of Southwark. From their union sprang the Rev. John Harvard, born in Southwark probably in 1607." This choice sample of misinformation is perpetrated in the guide-book issued by a great railway company, the title-page of which is adorned with the warning, "Copyright in Great Britain and the United States of America." There is some consolation in that prohibitive sentence: it may prevent timid compilers from perpetuating absurd blunders. And some day, perhaps, the great railway company will learn that Catherine Rogers married a Robert Harvard, that it was their son who was christened John, and that there is nothing "probable" about the date of his birth.

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Some modern pilgrims, it seems, will improve upon truth to the extent of affirming that John Harvard was born in the Harvard House. He was not. His birthplace was in Southwark, not far from the Globe Theatre associated with Shakespeare's London career. What is additionally certain is that on the eighth day of April 1605 a bridal party set out from the Harvard House in Stratford, and that a few minutes later, at the altar of Holy Trinity Church, close beside the spot where eleven years later to the very month the body of William Shakespeare was to be laid to rest, Robert Harvard and Catherine Rogers plighted that troth which was to have such momentous results for the cause of learning in New England.

While many of the older houses in Stratford wear an aspect suggestive of their years, there are not a few others which are more venerable than they look. In the first catagory must be placed Hall's Croft, once the home of the Dr. John Hall who married Shakespeare's elder daughter, and The Cage, which was for more than a generation the abode of the poet's younger daughter,

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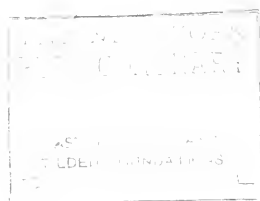
and the house of Julius Shaw, which adjoins Nash's house; in the latter class must be included Mason Croft, the residence of Marie Corelli, the Red Horse Hotel, and several more. In fact, there is no judging the age of Stratford houses by their present appearance, for in the early nineteenth century so many of them had their fronts plastered over that there is no telling what exquisite examples of half-timbered work may not be hidden from view behind the hideous cement which was so much in fashion a century ago.

Judging from indications which have been discovered while repairs were being carried out, it is highly probable that the Red Horse Hotel could once boast as picturesque an elevation as the Harvard House. Apart from that fact, however, the ancient hostelry is one of the recognized sights of the town owing to its enviable associations with the memory of Washington Irving. To all readers of the delightful "Sketch-Book" it is as familiar as Shakespeare's birthplace. Who has not been charmed with the gentle essayist's description of the sense of

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THE RED HORSE HOTEL
(Washington Irving's Hotel)



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comfort which suffused his being as, his boots kicked off and his feet thrust into slippers, he stretched himself before the glowing fire of his little parlour in the hospitable hotel? Let the world without go as it liked, he mused, let kingdoms rise or fall, so long as he had the means wherewith to pay his reckoning he was monarch of all he surveyed. The armchair was his throne, "the poker his sceptre, and the little parlour, some twelve feet square, his undisputed empire." But the dream was soon broken. The clock struck the midnight hour, and then "there was a gentle tap at the door, and a pretty chambermaid, putting in her smiling face, inquired, with a hesitating air, whether I had rung. I understood it as a modest hint that it was time to retire. My dream of absolute dominion was at an end; so, abdicating my throne, like a prudent potentate, to avoid being deposed, and putting the Stratford guide-book under my arm, as a pillow companion, I went to bed, and dreamed all night of Shakespeare, the jubilee, and David Garrick."

Nearly a century has passed since that scene

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was enacted in the tiny room to the left of the archway which gives entrance to the Red Horse Hotel, but the apartment is to-day as much pervaded by Washington Irving's presence as when he was its actual occupant. His two rooms, indeed—for his bedroom is immediately over his sitting-room—are practically unchanged and are often sought out by those who hold their one-time guest in affectionate remembrance as the most gracious figure in the annals of American literary history.

So Georgian, indeed, is the appearance of Washington Irving's parlour that it is not difficult to realize that nearly a hundred years have elapsed since he presided on the armchair throne which is now carefully preserved in a glass-doored cupboard. To shut oneself into the little room for a brief spell of meditation is to lose all reckoning of time. It is true the tables are littered with modern literature, but if the magazines and guide-books of the twentieth century are swept out of sight there is little else to recall the present. The old sexton's grandfather clock, the high-backed chairs, the

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venerable tables, the antique topographical views and old prints create an atmosphere wholly in harmony with the spirit of the "Sketch-Book." Perhaps the stickler for accuracy will discover that the apartment is not "some twelve feet square," but measures fourteen feet six inches by nine feet six inches; otherwise he will have little fault to find with Irving's description. It will aid the pilgrim's imagination to gaze upon Irving's portrait and to examine the quaint silhouette of the "pretty chambermaid" who was immortalized by the American guest. If, too, he is a trustworthy person, not given to collecting relics regardless of their ownership, he will be entrusted for a few minutes with that tiny poker, Irving's "sceptre," which is usually kept under lock and key. And from the little parlour he may make a journey upstairs to the modest bedroom where Irving slept and dreamed of Shakespeare and David Garrick.

Another ancient hostelry, which depends for its attractions more upon its venerable history than associations with famous men, is the Shakespeare Hotel in Chapel Street. Originally a manor-

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house built in the fourteenth century, as the claim is, it has for some two hundred years catered for the needs of the traveller, and within the past few years judicious restoration has transformed the interior into an approximate reproduction of its original oak-beamed and open-fireplaced appearance. The old sign, with a portrait of Shakespeare and the legend, "Take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again," hangs at the head of the ancient black oak staircase, while the walls of the passages and public rooms are adorned with countless pictures which owed their inspiration to one or other of the poet's creations. All the bedrooms are named after the titles of the plays, while the bar is decorated with the appropriate words "Measure for Measure."

But the Clopton Bridge and the Guild Chapel and the Harvard House and the two hostelries just described belong to ancient history; there are other buildings of a more modern date which the pilgrim to Stratford cannot afford to ignore.

Chief among the latter is that Shakespeare Memorial which occupies so prominent a site on

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THE SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL THEATRE

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the bank of the Avon. From the old bridge, indeed, it is as conspicuous as Holy Trinity Church itself, and its lofty tower is as much a beacon to the devotee as the spire of the poet's resting-place.

Garrick is sometimes credited with entertaining the ambition to found at Stratford an institution in honour of Shakespeare which should serve as a kind of university for all textual and histrionic students of the poet. He may have cherished such an idea before his "Jubilee" experience; subsequently, however, such were the satires and lampoons provoked by his masquerading at Stratford, his enthusiasm cooled, and it was left for another actor to revive the project in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The actor in question was Charles Mathews, most remarkable of mimics, who when fulfilling an engagement at Stratford in the closing month of 1820 added this footnote to his playbill: "At the conclusion of the evening's entertainment Mr. Mathews will have the honour of submitting to the audience the nature of some proposals that have been suggested for the purpose of erecting, in the

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form of a Theatre in Stratford, a National Monument and Mausoleum to the immortal memory of Shakespeare." As the actor had to give his performance in the Town Hall in lieu of a properly equipped theatre, he may have had an ulterior motive in submitting his scheme to the natives of the town. A "Mausoleum" was certainly not needed in view of the grave and monument in the parish church, but perhaps that was added as a bait to ensure subscriptions for the theatre which was necessary. The project, however, did not awaken any practical enthusiasm, and it was not until Charles E. Flower took the matter in hand in 1874 by presenting a site and a thousand pounds that a serious beginning was made with the movement which eventually resulted in the erection of the semi-Elizabethan pile of buildings familiar to all visitors to Stratford.

Whether the structure as a whole is as happy in design as might be desired in view of it being the most important modern memorial of Shakespeare in his native town must be decided by each pilgrim for himself. It is, however, a matter for

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gratitude that the town does now possess an auditorium eminently suitable for the performance of the poet's plays, a library for the housing of the literature which has sprung up around his name, and a gallery for the display of those works of art in canvas and marble which his genius has inspired.

Of the theatre nothing more need be said than that it provides an adequate playhouse for those performances which mark the birthday festival every year. It is compact, comfortable, has excellent acoustic properties, is well ventilated, and possesses a picturesque drop-scene representing Queen Elizabeth going in state to the opening of the Globe Theatre. The first performance took place on April 23, 1879, when Helen Faucit and Barry Sullivan appeared as the chief characters in "Much Ado about Nothing."

For a library which has not been in existence much more than a generation the oak presses of the Memorial are surprisingly well stocked, the volumes numbering upwards of seven thousand. Here, then, the student, who is given every facility for research, can consult practically every

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edition of Shakespeare's plays, from the costly First Folios down to the cheapest reprint, while the illustrative literature is rich in the standard works of a critical, historical, bibliographical, and biographical nature. In due time, no doubt, the library will take rank as the most complete collection of all printed material relating to Shakespeare and the history of the drama, for even newspaper cuttings are regularly filed and indexed.

To the casual visitor, however, it is probable that the picture galleries of the Memorial will provide the greatest pleasure, for on the walls of the hall and landing and upstairs rooms there is already shown an admirable collection of busts, portraits, and imaginative interpretations of the poet's plays. The statuary includes reproductions of the Westminster Abbey monument, the bust in Holy Trinity Church, the Becker Death-Mask, and marble busts of such famous impersonators of the Shakespeare heroines as Mary Anderson, Ellen Terry, Sarah Siddons, Helen Faucit, and Ada Rehan. Most of these are exhibited in the hall or library.

In the main picture gallery the most con-

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spicuous position is rightly given to the Droeshout portrait of the poet, which, as already noted, is regarded as the only contemporary likeness in existence. The portrait, which is painted on a panel of English elm prepared with white plaster and red priming, bears other evidences of age than the inscription in the upper left-hand corner of "Willm. Shakespeare, 1609." By its side may be seen a proof of the engraving which adorned the First Folio of 1623, and a comparison of the two makes it obvious that the latter was based on the former. If the visitor desires to still further perplex himself with the problem of Shakespeare's portrait, he will find ample material close at hand, for the gallery also includes the Venice, Jacob Tonson, Willett, Napier, and Soest pictures, while in addition there is a photograph of the Becker Death-Mask and a replica of that D'Avenant bust which is more satisfactory as a work of art than convincing as a likeness.

Scattered here and there through the collection are many less dubious portraits of actors and actresses who have won fame by the interpretation of Shakespearean characters. Other portraits

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might have been rejected with advantage, for it is not easy to understand upon what principle room has been found for W. Farren in the character of Sir Peter Teazle, J. L. Toole and W. H. Stephen in "The Cricket on the Hearth," Mrs. Young as Cora in "Pizarro," or Mrs. Stirling as Peg Woffington. It is to be feared, indeed, that the officials of the Memorial, like the trustees of the Birthplace, have not exercised sufficient discretion in looking gift-horses in the mouth, and that consequently there will some day have to be a wholesale clearance of many incongruous exhibits. When that day arrives, however, there will be no need to plead for the preservation of Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of Mrs. Siddons, George Romney's "Titania," or the spirited bust of "Mary Anderson as Hermione."

When the visitor turns to the pictures which are frankly imaginative interpretations of scenes in different plays he will probably derive most enjoyment from those which were originally painted as contributions to the famous Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. The originator of that gallery, John Boydell, after amassing a large fortune as a print

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publisher, conceived the idea of offering for subscription a series of engravings illustrative of the plays of Shakespeare, the originals of which were to be specially painted for the gallery. In pursuit of that ambitious scheme he gave commissions to all the best artists of the day, and as soon as a sufficient number of pictures had been completed he erected a gallery in Pall Mall for their reception. In the end upwards of a hundred and seventy paintings were executed by some thirty-three artists, at a cost to Boydell of some thirty thousand pounds. It was, in truth, as the originator claimed, a "national attempt," and no subject, he added, could have been more appropriate than "England's inspired poet and great painter of nature, Shakespeare." Owing to various circumstances, the pictures are now widely scattered, but some representative examples have happily found a permanent home in the Memorial at Stratford. There are pictures, then, by Robert Smirke, Henry Fuseli, Francis Wheatley, Thomas Stothard, James Northcote, and Sir Joshua Reynolds which are exceedingly valuable illustrations of the æsthetic appreciation of Shakespeare

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in the late eighteenth century. Among the other pictures which lend variety to the gallery are Thomas Brook's arrestive "Shakespeare before Sir Thomas Lucy," H. J. Fradelle's decorative "Othello," and Henry P. Briggs's vivacious picture of "Fanny Kemble in the green-room of Covent Garden dressing for her first appearance as Juliet." Nor should the visitor overlook that stately portrait by Paul van Somer of "Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton," the aristocratic friend and patron of Shakespeare.

Another modern monument which, truth to tell, is more commendable for its utility than its beauty, stands in the centre of the old Rother Market, an open space where five roads meet and not far from the birthplace in Henley Street. This, of course, is the Memorial Fountain, which owes its existence to the generosity of George W. Childs, of Philadelphia. The inscriptions on the four sides of the structure, which includes a four-dialled clock in its upper story, tell how it was the gift of an American citizen to the town of Shakespeare in the Jubilee year of Queen Victoria, repeat quotations from the plays in praise of the

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THE SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

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veteran Queen and "honest water," and cite Washington Irving's eulogy: "Ten thousand blessings on the bard who has gilded the dull realities of life with innocent illusions." At the dedication ceremony in October 1887, whereat the principal speech was delivered by Henry Irving, there was read a felicitous letter from James Russell Lowell declaring that the dust that is sacred to the Englishman is not less sacred to the American, and that sentiment found fitting echo in the poem which Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote specially for the occasion:

*"Land of our Fathers, ocean makes us two,
But heart to heart is true!
Proud is your towering daughter in the West,
Yet in her burning life-blood reign confest
Her mother's pulses beating in her breast.
This holy fount, whose rills from heaven descend,
Its gracious drops shall lend—
Both foreheads bathed in that baptismal dew,
And love make one the old home and the new!"*

CHAPTER V : THE SHAKESPEARE VILLAGES

BIOGRAPHIES of Shakespeare fall naturally into the two categories of the canonical and the apocryphal. And according to the type so are the contents. The canonical life is a sober, somewhat dryas dust affair, in which tradition is scouted and anecdote is supplanted by learned fancies. The apocryphal life is apt to go to the other extreme and strain credulity to the breaking-point.

To hit the happy medium is somewhat difficult. It needs a judgment finely balanced and fully informed. For there are so many legends about the poet which it is difficult to accept or dismiss on the score of fitness and probability. No doubt some of the anecdotes which figured in the jest-books of the eighteenth century were fathered on Shakespeare for lack of a more conspicuous sponsor, and in the main their puerile nature is a sufficient proof of their bastard origin. The devotee of the poet is often, indeed, in a sad

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case; if some of the stories of his hero are scorned as bearing the same relation to sober fact as the Apocrypha to the received Canon of Scripture, he is at least compelled to admit that if they are not authentic they often make good reading.

And if some authorities are inclined to return the verdict of "not proven" to the charge that Shakespeare was a hard drinker, it must be admitted that the balance of the evidence of tradition inclines to the other scale. There is that old story, for example, which tells how when he took a friend down into his cellar that friend observed there were no chairs to sit upon, and asked the reason. "Because," rejoined the poet, "I will have no man that comes here drink any longer than he can stand." That anecdote is, of course, capable of a temperance interpretation; but on the other hand it suggests an endurance in imbibition which gives point to another story.

For about midway in the eighteenth century there became current an anecdote which has immortalized a group of villages to the south-

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west of Stratford. The chief of those villages was Bidford, which in the poet's days was the meeting-place of two companies of hard drinkers known as the Topers and the Sippers. The former were, of course, the more seasoned tipplers, but the latter were thought capable of holding their own against any other drinkers in the country. So proud, indeed, were the Topers and Sippers of their accomplishments that they seem to have issued a general challenge to all the devotees of Bacchus. That challenge, so the story went, was the occasion of Shakespeare getting together a little band of his comrades and making a journey to Bidford to sustain the honour of the convivial spirits of Stratford.

When, however, the Stratford champions arrived at Bidford they discovered to their mortification that the Topers had gone to another village on a similar errand. But the Sippers were at home and expressed their willingness to try a bout with the visitors from Stratford. Although holding this second team in small account, Shakespeare and his companions accepted the challenge, nothing doubting that victory

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would be swift and easy. But the despised Sippers gave so good an account of themselves that the men of Stratford soon retired from the contest. On leaving Bidford, indeed, they were in so sore a plight that they sank down by the wayside under a crab-tree, and there spent the night. With the morning confidence returned to some of Shakespeare's comrades, and they urged him to return with them to Bidford to try another bout with the victorious Sippers. But the poet declined; he was quite satisfied with his experience of drinking with

*"Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hillborough, and hungry Grafton,
With dadging Exhall, papist Wixford,
Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford."*

It would seem, then, that the Topers and Sippers were recruited from eight villages, and the quatrain, which has been fathered upon Shakespeare, has led to those eight hamlets being described as the Shakespeare villages. The conscientious pilgrim may wish to include them in

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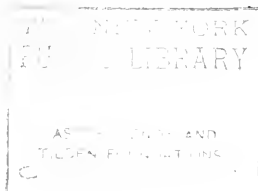
his itinerary, and the accomplishment of that ambition will lead him through pleasant scenery and make him acquainted with many venerable churches and bridges and manor-houses. At Bidford, indeed, there is still pointed out a handsome Tudor building which is said to have been the Falcon Inn where Shakespeare and his companions were defeated by the Sippers, and Temple Grafton is of greater interest as containing the successor of that ancient church in which in all probability the poet was wedded to Anne Hathaway.

After all, however, it is not the group of hamlets to the south-west of Stratford, but another group to the north-east which has a far greater right to the designation of the Shakespeare villages. These, of course, are Charlecote, Hampton Lucy,⁷ Snitterfield, Wilmcote, and Shottery. They may all be included in a four hours' drive and should on no account be overlooked by the pilgrim who is anxious to complete his knowledge of the Shakespeare country.

Of two of the real Shakespeare villages it may be said that they are as familiar to the lover of



ENTRANCE TO CHARLECOTE PARK



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the poet as Stratford itself. One of them, namely, Charlecote, was included in the pilgrimage of Washington Irving and Hawthorne, each of whom rounded out his visit by exploring the scene of Shakespeare's legendary deer-stalking exploit. What is amazing, however, is that both the American pilgrims entirely ignored the other hamlet. Neither in the "Sketch-Book" nor "Our Old Home" is there any reference to Shuttery and Anne Hathaway's girlhood home.

Charlecote is of course of supreme interest for its sixteenth-century master, Sir Thomas Lucy, and its association with the incident which is generally accepted as the cause of Shakespeare leaving his native town for London. But whether the youthful poet did actually indulge in poaching and was punished for his offence, and then took revenge by lampooning Sir Thomas Lucy, and finally fled the countryside to escape further whipping and imprisonment, has been a matter of dispute for many years.

De Quincey, it will be remembered, would have nothing to do with the deer-stealing story. He called it a "slandorous and idle tale," an

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anecdote "fabulous and rotten to its core," and asked his readers' permission to deal with it "with summary indignation." Unfortunately the Opium-eater was neither an antiquary nor a judicious historian, and in any case it must be remembered that if so well established a tradition is to be rejected and the same precedent followed in connexion with other stories, there would be practically nothing left of Shakespeare biography. De Quincey protested too much; after all, deer-stalking was not quite the heinous offence postulated by his indignant outburst.

While it is impossible to date the first appearance of many Shakespeare stories, no such uncertainty attaches to the deer-stealing incident. It was first placed on record in a manuscript written before 1708, the year of the death of that Rev. Richard Davies, a Gloucestershire rector, who made the following note in a manuscript account of the life of Shakespeare: "Much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits, particularly from Sir . . . Lucy, who had him oft whipped and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native county, to his

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great advancement. But his revenge was so great that he is his Justice Clodpate, and calls him a great man, and that in allusion to his name bore three louses rampant for his arms." This version was somewhat amplified by Nicholas Rowe, who, in his life of the poet published in 1709, gave the following account of a story which had been gleaned for him independently by a visitor to Stratford: "He had, by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and amongst them some, that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing, engaged him more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill-usage, he made a ballad upon him. And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time, and shelter himself in London."

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Rowe, it will be observed, specifically states that the offending ballad which the poet wrote, and, according to another story, affixed to the gates of Sir Thomas Lucy's mansion, was "lost." That, however, did not deter some scribe from an attempt to supply the omission. Indeed, two attempts were made to fill in that lacuna in the works of Shakespeare. Some years, then, after the publication of Rowe's life it was claimed that one verse of the satirical ballad had been discovered among the manuscripts of the antiquary Oldys. That stanza seems to have been accepted as genuine by Washington Irving, even though he admitted it was a "rough pasquinade." The reader who is familiar with the Shakespeare style will be competent to form his own judgment when he has read the following lines :

*" A parliament member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scarecrow, at London an asse,
If lowsie is Lucy, as some volke miscalle it,
Then Lucy is lowsie, whatever befall it.
He thinks himself great ;
Yet an asse in his state,*

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*We allow by his ears but with asses to mate.
If Lucy is lowsie, as some volke miscalle it,
Then sing lowsie is Lucy, whatever befall it."*

Quite different in style and point of satire was the other fragment, which is said to have been written down at Stratford after hearing it sung by an old woman. The recorder of the following two stanzas is said to have rewarded the old woman with a new gown, and to have declared that he would have given her ten guineas if she could have remembered the whole :

*" Sir Thomas was too covetous
To covet so much deer,
When horns enough upon his head
Most plainly did appear.*

*" Had not his worship one deer left ?
What then ? He had a wife
Took pains enough to find him horns
Should last him during life."*

Such are the samples of doggerel which have

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been fathered upon Shakespeare in connexion with the deer-stalking legend. They may have influenced others than De Quincey in dismissing the incident as fabulous and a "slandorous and idle tale." But so sober a biographer as Sir Walter Raleigh takes quite another view. He regards the story as perfectly credible; "the evidence that remains to us is unanimous in its favour; the allusions in the plays bear it out; and there is no solid argument against it."

One apparently "solid argument" has certainly been adduced. It has been contended that the Sir Thomas Lucy of the story had no deer-park. De Quincey made fine play with this. "A baronet, who has no deer and no park, is supposed to persecute a poet for stealing these aerial deer out of this aerial park, both lying in *nephelococcygia*." It may be remarked that Sir Thomas Lucy could hardly have been a "baronet," seeing that he had been in his grave eleven years before that title was created, and with regard to the other point of De Quincey's jest Sir Sidney Lee remarks: "But Sir Thomas Lucy was an extensive game-preserve, and owned at Charlecote a warren in which a few

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harts or does doubtless found an occasional home.” In further support of that argument it may be recalled that in 1602 the successor of Sir Thomas Lucy, who also bore his father’s Christian name, appears in the list of those who sent bucks to Lord Ellesmere when he entertained Queen Elizabeth. This is a strong presumptive proof that the Sir Thomas of Shakespeare’s young manhood possessed both a park and deer at Charlecote.

By “the allusions in the plays” Sir Walter Raleigh means, of course, the opening scene of “The Merry Wives of Windsor.” That scene, indeed, has been accepted by many as Shakespeare’s autobiography. One theorist assures us that the poet introduced into that play more of the colour of Stratford life than in any other of his works. It is true the scene is laid in Windsor, but it is claimed that the locality is really Stratford. We are asked to believe, moreover, that Anne Page and William Fenton are but the name-disguises of Anne Hathaway and William Shakespeare. And William Fenton’s wart has been adduced as sober evidence, especially as the Chandos portrait of the poet is said to show a

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“perceptible mark or wart” ! Aside from such hair-splitting interpretations, there remains the fact that the first scene of “The Merry Wives of Windsor” does introduce us to the self-important Justice Shallow, the “Justice Clodpate” of the earlier deer-stealing story, and most commentators are agreed that Shakespeare’s original for that character was none other than his whilom persecutor, Sir Thomas Lucy. The scene, indeed, has been taken as the poet’s apologia for his youthful exploit and as his belated and most ample revenge on the knight of Charlecote. He was, of course, a justice of the peace, and “Coram” and “Custaloram” and the “dozen white luces” in his coat-of-arms were an additional clue to the man who boasted “three luces haurient argent.” And as Justice Shallow’s charge against Falstaff comprised the indictments “You have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge,” the identity seems complete.

Charlecote, then, is not likely to be despoiled of its association with the poet. Besides, romance and art and poetry have strengthened the link. More than one painter has transferred to canvas

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his imaginative conception of the scene in Charlecote Hall when the youthful poacher was dragged before Sir Thomas Lucy, while Landor and Richard Garnett have made the episode the theme of prose and verse. Landor's "Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare" won from Charles Lamb the high praise that only two men could have written it—that is, the man who did write it and the man about whom it was written. Landor certainly knew the setting of his story, for he was a Warwick man himself and was as familiar with Charlecote as with the legend. And the skit is most enjoyable for the serious manner in which, as evidence, the table on which Shakespeare had eaten the deer is produced at the trial. There were the four "deadly spots," mounds of grease, which were proof enough of the culprit's offence. And the evidence was conclusive when the worthy Silas pronounced them on oath, after tasting, to be the fat of buck venison. But the "Citation" must be read as a whole, through all its quaint dialogue and spirited incident down to the sudden escape of the prisoner.

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Nor is Richard Garnett's little drama of "William Shakespeare, Pedagogue and Poacher," less amusing. In its motive it owes something to the "horn" doggerel quoted above, for Lady Lucy is described as enamoured of the young poacher and jealous of Anne Hathaway. The climax is different, however, for Shakespeare is released from Sir Thomas Lucy's clutches by no less a person than the Earl of Leicester, who has journeyed to Stratford to command the poet's appearance at court owing to his fame having reached the ears of Queen Elizabeth. Scattered through the drama are many admirable pen-portraits of the poet, and the description of Charlecote is welcome as expressing in verse the picture the house presents to this day:

*"Sound stands the mansion still, 'tis true, with roof
Impervious to the beams and rains of heaven
Nor yet bereft of soaring pinnacle,
Or portalled lodge, or zone of stately trees ;
The thickest blooms and fruits ; nor hath the
plough
Profaned or daisied mead or lawny dell."*

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While Charlecote Hall is rarely open to visitors, the park is traversable on the payment of a fee. But mansion and park alike are well within view from the public road. The latter is still distinguished for those stately, shady, sleepy elms which so took the fancy of Hawthorne. "They were civilized trees," he wrote, "known to man and befriended by him for ages past. There is an indescribable difference between the tamed, but by no means effete (on the contrary, the richer and more luxuriant), Nature of England, and the rude, shaggy, barbarous Nature which offers us its racier companionship in America." And from the trees his fancy wandered to the deer, the descendants of which still browse over the sward of Charlecote park. "By and by, among those refined and venerable trees, I saw a large herd of deer, mostly reclining, but some standing in picturesque groups, while the stags threw their large antlers aloft, as if they had been taught to make themselves tributary to the scenic effect. Some were running fleetly about, vanishing from light into shadow and glancing forth again, with here and there a little fawn careering

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at its mother's heels. These deer are almost in the same relation to the wild, natural state of their kind that the trees of an English park hold to the rugged growth of an American forest. They have held a certain intercourse with man for immemorial years; and, most probably, the stag that Shakespeare killed was one of the progenitors of this very herd, and may himself have been a partly civilized and humanized deer, though in a less degree than these remote posterity. They are a little wilder than sheep, but they do not snuff the air at the approach of human beings, nor evince much alarm at their pretty close proximity; although, if you continue to advance, they toss their heads and take to their heels in a kind of mimic terror, or something akin to feminine skittishness, with a dim remembrance or tradition, as it were, of their having come from a wild stock." It may have been from observing this tame herd, Hawthorne suggested, that Shakespeare conceived his loving and pathetic description of a wounded stag.

As to Charlecote Hall itself, the "air of still-

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ness and solitude " which impressed Washington Irving yet prevails. This notion may be due to that distant view which is all that is possible for most visitors, but it is one which is confirmed each time the mansion is seen. It stands at the end of its umbrageous avenue in a kind of comatose condition, as though ever dreaming of its more glorious past. Although built so long ago as 1559, and of course constructed on a ground plan representing the letter E out of compliment to Queen Elizabeth, it is as well preserved a specimen of Tudor domestic architecture as can be found in many a day's search. The house and estates are often said to be still in possession of the original Lucy family, and the pilgrim will now and then have pointed out to him the present owner as a lineal descendant of Shakespeare's Sir Thomas. But all that is a mistake. What descent there was has been much watered by distaff inheritance and assumption of the name of Lucy. The fact is that the direct line became extinct with the sons of a Fulk Lucy, whose second daughter Alice left the estate to her grandson, a Rev. John Hammond. He after-

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wards assumed the name of Lucy, and in due time it was a daughter of this line who came into the possession of Charlecote. When she married a baronet in his own right there was another assumption of the family name on the part of her husband.

But the real Lucy line, at least in effigy, may be seen on the tombs which stand in Charlecote Church. Although that church has been rebuilt, the chapel containing the memorials of the knights of Charlecote is intact, and the three principal tombs, it will be observed, preserve the memory of as many Sir Thomases. Hence the pardonable confusion which sometimes bewilders the Shakespearean pilgrim. The poet, as a matter of fact, was the contemporary of three Sir Thomases, but it was the knight who died in 1600 who was so jealous of his deer. The second enjoyed the title and estates for but five years; the third out-lived Shakespeare nearly a quarter of a century.

Although there is no inscription on the altar-tomb of the first Sir Thomas to indicate that he shares it with his wife, it does bear a white marble effigy of the original of Justice Shallow, the face

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of which, albeit it is that of a goodly-looking man, may suggest to some that self-conceit and pride of rank which one is apt to attribute to a man who may have dealt hardly with the divine poet. By his side lies the full-length effigy of his wife, whose virtues, as celebrated by the inscription from her husband's pen, were so overwhelming as to make Dr. Garnett's suggestion as to her illicit love for Shakespeare seem incredible. "All the time of her lyfe a true and faythful servant of her good God, never detected of any cryme or vice," is a testimonial which puts all poetic licence to shame. And yet it should not be forgotten that the lady's son-in-law described her as a thorough vixen !

It was the second Sir Thomas who made Lord Ellesmere that present of a buck referred to above ; the third Sir Thomas was so much a patron of letters that it was thought fit to adorn his monument with a shelf of books. It would have been pleasant if that dummy library had included an identifiable replica of the First Folio. The third Sir Thomas Lucy, however, whatever his leanings towards literature, shared to the full his grandfather's determination to repress all poaching

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on his estate. In evidence of that ancestral trait there exists a lengthy document in which Sir Thomas laid before the Star Chamber a bill of complaint against a dozen or more poachers who had conspired and combined to hunt deer in one of his parks. This was in July 1610, when Shakespeare was still living and able to appreciate the humour of the situation. All the Lucy monuments, by the way, bear the three lucas, otherwise pikes, of the family arms, and one tomb actually shows three lucas in four quarters, making a total reminiscent of "the dozen white lucas" in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

When the pilgrim resumes his tour of the Shakespeare villages, he will, if he be fortunate in his cicerone, have his attention called to that "Tumble-down Stile" which is said to have been the scene of the poet's capture when returning from his poaching expedition. The stile is worth noting on its own account. Enticing little models are on sale in the souvenir shops of Stratford, but it is interesting to examine the original set in the hedgerow of this picturesque Warwickshire countryside. It is a unique struc-

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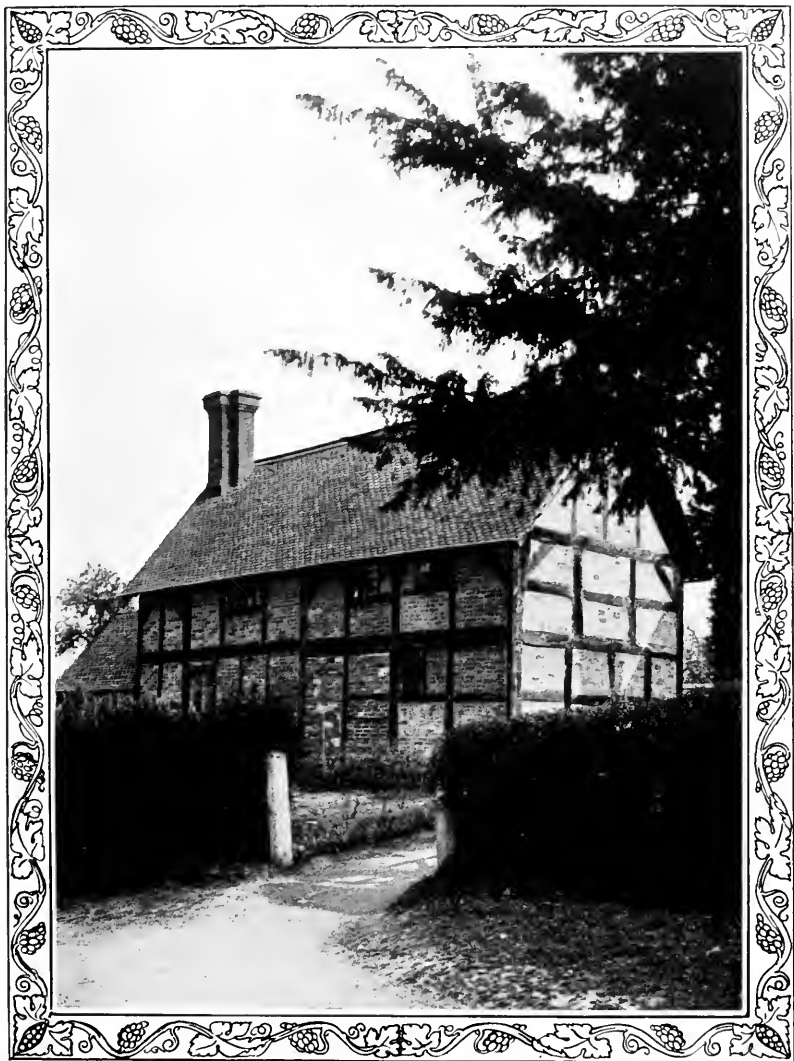
ture, having nothing in common with the turnstile or with the usual type which necessitates the climbing of wooden bars. There are four bars, it is true, but they are so pivoted on an upright that they can be depressed with a touch of the hand and fall back into position as soon as released.

Hampton Lucy, the next village in the itinerary, is pleasantly situated on the Avon and recalls the fact that this part of the Lucy estates was a gift of "Bloody Mary" to Shakespeare's Sir Thomas in 1556. Had that miserable queen been acquainted with the fact that her beneficiary had been educated by the martyrologist Foxe and would live to favour his Puritan sentiments, she would hardly have made him so generous a gift. The church here has been rebuilt, but the old grammar school remains as an example of early seventeenth-century architecture. Like the church, the bridge over the river is modern, but there are nooks and corners of the village which may well have changed but little since the days of the poet.

Although Hampton Lucy has no direct con-

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nexion with the life-story of Shakespeare, Snitterfield, which lies two or three miles to the north, is in a different case. That village, it will be remembered, is accepted by the best authorities as the birthplace and boyhood home of the poet's father, John Shakespeare, and to this day there stands, on the outskirts of the hamlet, an attractive little half-timbered building known traditionally as the Shakespeare Cottage. So far as appearance goes, the cottage may well have been built in the sixteenth century, but there is nothing more than legend to connect it with the poet's family. There is every probability that the Richard Shakespeare who in 1550 was the tenant at Snitterfield of Robert Arden of Wilmcote was the grandfather of the poet, and that his son Henry, who never left the village, was his uncle. We know, too, that Mary Shakespeare, the mother of the poet, had an interest in two houses situated at Snitterfield. These details practically exhaust all the known facts of the Shakespeare connexion with the village, and the pilgrim must fill in the blanks as well as his imagination will permit. Rural



THE SHAKESPEARE COTTAGE AT SNITTERFIELD

THE YORK
FUEL FERRY

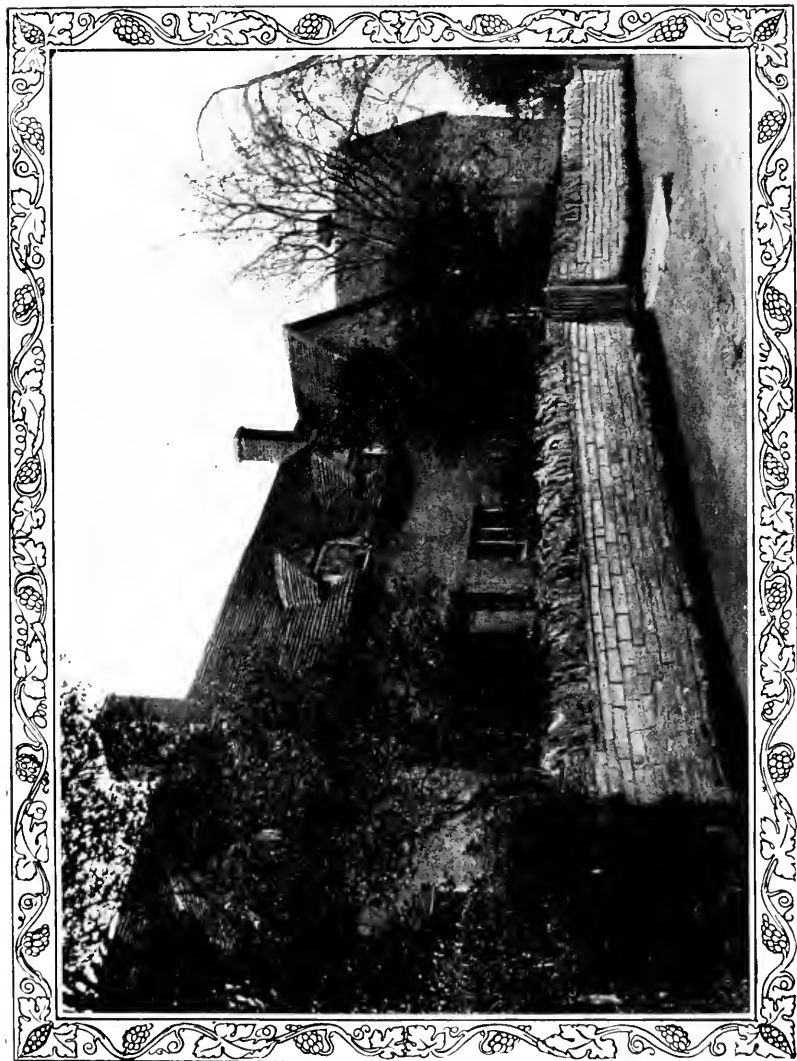
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traditions are tenacious things ; they are often trustworthy evidence ; and in the absence of documentary proof to the contrary the Shakespeare Cottage will doubtless long continue to excite interest for its probable connexion with the ancestors of the immortal bard. And in any case the hamlet must always be held in honour as the scene of the ministerial labours of that Rev. Richard Jago whose allegory on the garden of New Place was cited in a previous chapter.

On the return journey to Stratford the route lies through two hamlets the names of which must quicken the imagination of all devout Shakespeareans. The first of these, Wilmcote, was the home of the poet's mother, Mary Arden ; the second, Shottery, was the scene of his winning Anne Hathaway to his love. Save for the Arden farmhouse, Wilmcote will not detain the visitor long. The blight of modern building has fallen heavily on the village, and in place of thatched roof and oak-beamed walls there is the unloveliness of slate and common brick. Happily the Arden homestead has not been tampered with. It stands close by the roadside, fenced

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off from the highway by a sturdy stone wall and embowered in summertime with a wealth of rambler roses and other creepers. It is not a pretentious building; its downstairs windows and upstairs dormers suggest an accommodation limited to some ten rooms; but it was a spacious house for sixteenth-century days, and the inventory of the belongings of Robert Arden shows him to have been a yeoman of more than ordinary substance. The old oak beams in the passage and low-pitched rooms would still provide a seemly setting for those benches and chairs, those coffers and "painted cloths," those chafing-dishes and candlesticks which were tabulated among the "goodes moveable and unmoveable" of Robert Arden when he died in 1556. His will of the same year showed that his youngest daughter Mary held that uppermost place in his affection which is so often the fortune of the latest-born female child of an old man. In the oblivion which has overtaken so many of the buildings connected with the earthly days of the poet it is a cause for congratulation that there is still spared the quaint old house which



MARY ARDEN'S COTTAGE, WILMORE

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was the girlhood home of the woman who gave him birth.

But Wilmcote has another claim upon the Shakespearean student. When it is recalled that the local pronunciation of the name of the village is "Wincot" a new interest is imparted to the Induction of "The Taming of the Shrew." The modern stage directions inform us that the scene of that humorous prelude was "before an ale-house on a heath," but in the First Folio the imagination of the reader was allowed to locate the episode as he would. There is nothing, then, in the earliest text of the comedy to controvert the view of those who hold that in describing the quarrel between the drunken Christopher Sly and Marian Hacket, the "fat ale-wife," Shakespeare had in mind one of his haunts in the adjacent village of Wilmcote. Tradition, indeed, affirms that the poet was in the habit of frequenting the "Wincot" ale-house that he might divert himself with the sayings of a fool who was employed in a neighbouring mill. It has been discovered, too, that the name of "Sly" is mentioned several times in the records of Stratford. Altogether,

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then, there are reasonable grounds for believing that in penning the opening scene of "The Taming of the Shrew" the dramatist drew freely upon his Stratford reminiscences.

One other hamlet remains, the Shottery famous all the world over for that picturesque thatched cottage which was the home of Anne Hathaway. About a generation ago the startling announcement was made that an old picture of Shakespeare's marriage with the maiden of Shottery had been brought to light. It depicted an interior and an inner room, the first being occupied by the parents of the bride, of whom the father was engaged in weighing out in scales the gold and silver of his daughter's marriage portion. In the inner room were the figures of Anne and her lover, with a priest joining their hands together. The owner of the picture hazarded the guess that the ceremony was taking place in the house of the bride's father, and he noted that the chief room had a "tessellated pavement" and that its furniture included a "cabinet with statuary on the top of it." But no one seems to have been greatly excited over the "discovery," and in a few months

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ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE, SHOTTERY

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the canvas sank into that oblivion from which it had been untimely rescued.

According to the canonical lives of Shakespeare, the father of the poet's bride was a fairly prosperous farmer of Shottery, who left his daughter Agnes, a name which was used as interchangeable with Anne, the sum of six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence. The other facts are that the cottage at Shottery remained in the possession of the Hathaway family until well on in the last century and was purchased by the birthplace trustees twenty years ago. In its exterior the cottage is far more akin to what must have been its aspect in the sixteenth century than the birthplace, while the chief interior room, with its latticed windows and great open fireplace and massive-beamed ceiling, seems to exhale the very atmosphere of those far-off days when William Shakespeare came a-courting. The whole question of his marriage has, it is true, been cumbered with much dryasdust discussion about the prenuptial bond and other matters; but those details may be left in the hands of the antiquaries and lawyers. The ordinary pilgrim

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visits Shuttery in a romantic mood ; he can re-picture a lovely Warwickshire maiden issuing from that ancient doorway to meet that handsome young son of John Shakespeare of Stratford, and with that he is content. Than this picturesque cottage, then, with its ancient roof-tree and tangled garden of the flowers of old rural England, there could not be a more seemly terminus for a poetic pilgrimage.

NOTES FOR THE TOURIST

ROUTES

THERE is a choice of three railway lines from London to Stratford-on-Avon. During the summer, day excursions at a cheap rate are available by each, particulars of which may be learned from advertisements in the daily newspapers or from the inquiry offices of the different companies.

GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY Marylebone Station)

This is the shortest route, and consequently the best trains make the quickest journeys of any of the lines, the time occupied being a little over two hours. The usual service consists of six departures from London and five from Stratford-on-Avon daily (except Sundays), and the return fares are 29s. 3d. (\$7.00) first class and 15s. (\$3.75) third class. There are also week-end tickets, available

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from Friday to Tuesday, for 22*s.* 9*d.* (\$5.68)
first class and 11*s.* 3*d.* (\$2.83) third class.

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

(Paddington Station)

By this line there is a fuller service of trains, there being thirteen daily departures from London and twelve from Stratford-on-Avon, while on Sundays there are two outward and one return trains. Several of the trains have restaurant cars. The fares are the same as those on the Great Central Railway.

LONDON AND NORTH-WESTERN RAILWAY

(Euston Station)

This is the longest route, and there are but three trains daily (except Sundays) from London, with four from Stratford-on-Avon. The fares are identical with those from Marylebone.

HOTELS

SHAKESPEARE HOTEL

CENTRALLY situated on Chapel Street, this ancient hostelry has recently undergone thorough renovation and enlargement. The tariff for single bedrooms ranges from 4*s.* 6*d.* (\$1.12) upwards, while private sitting-rooms can be had from 7*s.* 6*d.* (\$1.88). The prices for meals are: Breakfast, from 1*s.* 6*d.* (37 ct.); luncheon, 2*s.* 6*d.* (62 ct.); dinner, 4*s.* 6*d.* (\$1.12). Weekly inclusive terms for single bedroom and board range from £3 13*s.* 6*d.* (\$18.37).

RED HORSE HOTEL

Familiarly known as "Washington Irving's hotel," this old-fashioned house is situated on Bridge Street close to the Avon and within a few minutes' walk of the birthplace. At the time of writing the tariff is under revision, but the rates

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quoted for the Shakespeare Hotel will furnish an approximate guide.

FALCON HOTEL

On Chapel Street, facing New Place, and hence within easy walking distance of all the Shakespeare shrines. The boarding terms, for single bedroom, are 10s. (\$2.50) per day or £3 3s. 0d. (\$15.75) per week. This house makes a special feature of providing bedroom and breakfast for from 5s. (\$1.25).

Private hotels, boarding-houses, and furnished apartments are numerous in Stratford, but terms and accommodation vary so much that the visitor contemplating a long stay should put up at one or other of the above-named hotels until suited.

EXCURSIONS

APART from the tour of the Shakespeare villages described in the last chapter, numerous interesting excursions can be made from Stratford-on-Avon, including the following :

WARWICK

(8 miles by one route ; $9\frac{1}{2}$ by another)

Famous for its Castle, the Leicester Hospital, and St. Mary's Church. The chief feature of the latter is the celebrated Beauchamp Chapel, with its ornate tombs of the Beauchamps and Dudleys. The Castle, which is one of the most ancient baronial residences of England still in use, may be seen any day on payment of a small fee. The literary pilgrim should note the birthplace of Walter Savage Landor.

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KENILWORTH

(13 miles)

The chief object of interest is the ruins of the historic Castle where the Earl of Leicester entertained Queen Elizabeth on such a lavish scale in 1575, as described by Sir Walter Scott in his novel "Kenilworth."

LEAMINGTON

(10 miles)

A typical inland watering-place, with the usual equipment of spring, pump-room, &c. Hawthorne describes the town in his "Our Old Home" from personal knowledge, for he once resided here in a "small nest of a place" on Lansdowne Circus.

EVESHAM

(16 miles)

Interesting for its noble remains of a Benedictine Abbey, of which the most conspicuous is the stately Bell Tower dating from the thirteenth

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EXCURSIONS

century. On the north of the town is the scene of the battle of 1265 which made Evesham famous in English history. Not far distant is the village of Broadwood, where Madame de Navarro (Mary Anderson) has her picturesque home.

COVENTRY

(18 miles)

Godiva's city, or "the City of the Three Spires," is famous for its churches, one of which, St. Michael, dates from 1133. Two parliaments were held here in the fifteenth century, and it was one of the prisons of Mary Queen of Scots. It was the home of George Eliot for two years.

An ideal day's outing for those with limited time may be enjoyed by including in one itinerary Warwick, Leamington, and Kenilworth. There is a regular coach trip in the summer making the Warwick and Kenilworth round, for which the fixed charge per person is £1 11s. 6d. (\$7.87). The tour of the Shakespeare villages may be made at a cost of 16s. (\$4.00).



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